

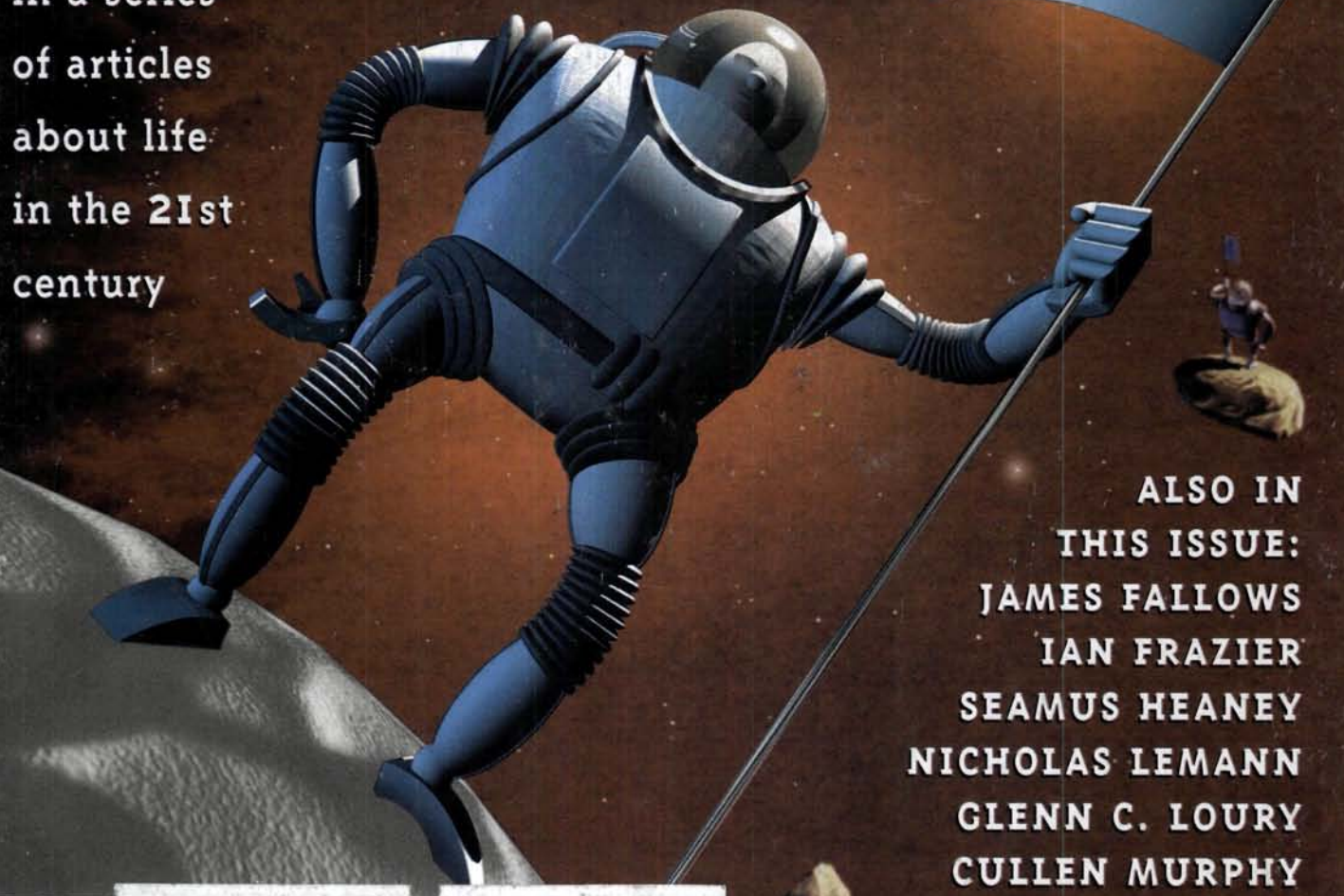
The Atlantic Monthly

NOVEMBER 1997

Colonizing the Solar System

by Freeman J. Dyson

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in a series
of articles
about life
in the 21st
century



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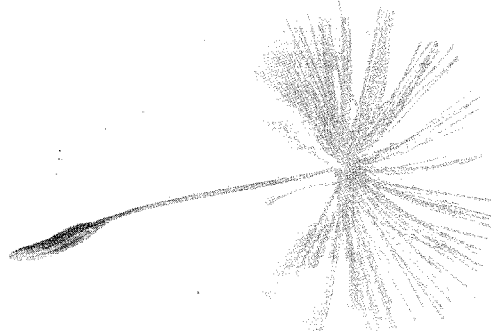


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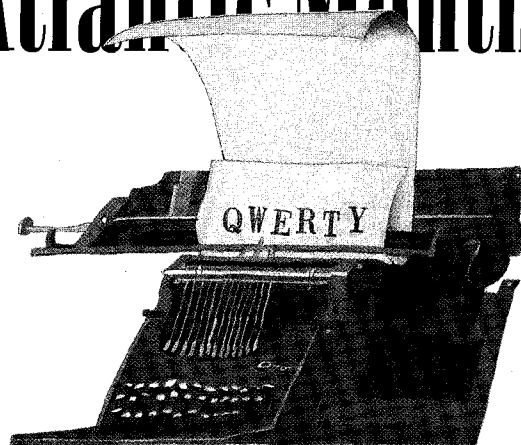
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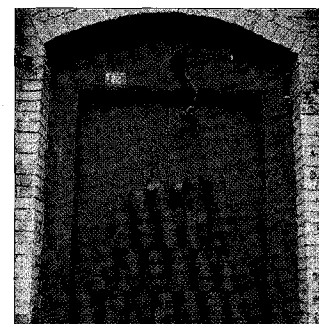
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THE *Atlantic Monthly* began publication 140 years ago, in November of 1857. Edward Sorel's drawing commemorates a dinner gathering not long afterward of three of the magazine's founders—Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell (the first editor), and James T. Fields (the second editor)—with the young William Dean Howells (the third editor). A reader looking back at the magazine's past, as we here have been doing in recent weeks, would identify many shifting preoccupations and many evolving emphases, but that reader would also notice a pair of durable questions braided through the length of the magazine's life: Into what kind of world are we headed? How should we steer our course?

In issues from the nineteenth century one finds contributors gamely looking ahead and wondering about such things as the following: What are the implications, for science and for society, if Charles Darwin's theories turn out to be correct? Will the vote be the best guarantor in the long run of civil rights for blacks? What will happen if America fails to become a maritime power? Is it possible to conceive of a role for govern-

ment in the management of industry and in safeguarding the welfare of workers? Should we attempt to preserve vast tracts of wilderness untouched? What unanticipated effects will this expanding thing called leisure time have on the American psyche?

Thinking important questions through in advance of urgent necessity has never been more important, or harder to do, than it is today. We have lost the margin for error once provided by ample space and time. Social and technological developments now take hold more quickly; we have enormous scope for making grave mistakes fast, with a mere tweak of GDP here or of DNA there. At the same time, the venues for considered reflection, for calm assessment, and for reacquaintance with admirable aspects of the human spirit seem to be shrinking.

These thoughts arise from reacquainting ourselves with our history—a natural anniversary pastime. But anniversaries can also be forward-looking occasions. To mark its 140th, *The Atlantic* this month offers an expanded issue, and inaugurates a series of articles about the twenty-first century. —THE EDITORS



CONTRIBUTORS

Henri Cole ("Childlessness") teaches writing at Harvard. His most recent book is *The Look of Things* (1995).

Freeman J. Dyson ("Warm-Blooded Plants and Freeze-Dried Fish") is the president of the Space Studies Institute, and was until his retirement a professor of physics at the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton, New Jersey.

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Richard Wilbur ("The Disappearing Alphabet") was poet laureate of the United States in 1987. He won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1957 for *Things of This World* and in 1989 for *New and Collected Poems*.

Garry Wills ("The Poses of Howard Hawks") is the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (1992).



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WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, and HARRIET
BEECHER STOWE, in the first issue, November, 1857

"So through the night rode Paul Revere;
And so through the night went his cry of alarm
To every Middlesex village and farm,—
A cry of defiance, and not of fear,—
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
And a word that shall echo forevermore!
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
Through all our history, to the last,
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoof-beat of that steed,
And the midnight-message of Paul Revere."

—HENRY W. LONGFELLOW

"Paul Revere's Ride," January, 1861

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of
wrath are stored;

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift
sword:

His truth is marching on."

—JULIA WARD HOWE

"Battle Hymn of the Republic," February, 1862

"So far our government has done nothing effective with its
forests . . . but is like a rich and foolish spendthrift who has in-
herited a magnificent estate in perfect order, and then has left
his rich fields and meadows, forests and parks, to be sold and
plundered and wasted at will, depending on their inexhaustible
abundance."

—JOHN MUIR

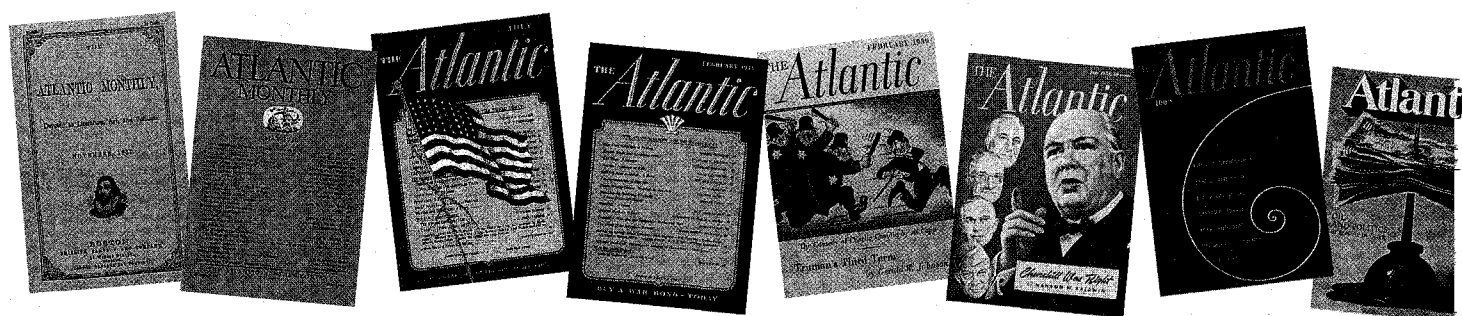
"The American Forests," August, 1897

"I have often thought it would be a blessing if each human be-
ing were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time
during his early adult life. Darkness would make him more ap-
preciative of sight; silence would teach him the joys of sound.

"Now and then I have tested my seeing friends to discover
what they see. Recently I was visited by a very good friend
who had just returned from a long walk in the woods, and I
asked her what she had observed. 'Nothing in particular,' she
replied. I might have been incredulous had I not been accus-
tomed to such responses, for long ago I became convinced that
the seeing see little."

—HELEN KELLER

"Three Days to See," January, 1933



"The advanced arithmetical machines of the future will be electrical in nature, and they will perform at 100 times present speeds, or more.

"Moreover, they will be far more versatile than present commercial machines, so that they may readily be adapted for a wide variety of operations. They will be controlled by a control card or film, they will select their own data and manipulate it in accordance with the instructions thus inserted, they will perform complex arithmetical computations at exceedingly high speeds, and they will record results in such form as to be readily available for distribution or for later further manipulation. Such machines will have enormous appetites."

—VANNEVAR BUSH
"As We May Think," July, 1945

"I have tried to make it clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or even more, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends."

—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
"The Negro Is Your Brother," August, 1963

"Even among the 'architects' of our Vietnam commitment, there has been persistent confusion. . . . Was it, for instance, a civil war, in which case counterinsurgency might suffice? . . . Who was the aggressor—and the 'real enemy'? The Viet Cong? Hanoi? Peking? Moscow? International Communism? . . . And confused throughout . . . was the question of American objectives."

—JAMES C. THOMSON JR.
"How Could Vietnam Happen?" April, 1968

"In order to enact Reagan's version of tax reduction, 'certain wages' had to be paid, and, as Stockman reasoned, the process of brokering was utterly free of principle or policy objectives. . . . Once the Reagan tacticians began making concessions beyond their 'policy-based' agenda, it developed that their trades and compromises and giveaways were utterly indistinguishable from the decades of interest-group accommodations that had preceded them, which they so righteously denounced. What was new about the Reagan revolution, in which oil-royalty owners win and welfare mothers lose?"

—WILLIAM GREIDER
"The Education of David Stockman," December, 1981

"Should America not make investment its number-one policy priority in the medium term [1992–2007], it will surely have to pay the price in the long term. It will not be a price denominated solely in terms of labor productivity, real wages, and global political influence. The price will also include an utter lack of preparation for the most stunning demographic transformation—from workers to dependents—in American history."

—PETER G. PETERSON
"The Morning After," October, 1987

"I view the United States of these last years of the twentieth century as essentially a tragic country, endowed with magnificent natural resources that it is rapidly wasting and exhausting, and with an intellectual and artistic intelligentsia of great talent and originality. For this intelligentsia the dominant political forces of the country have little understanding or regard. Its voice is normally silenced or outshouted by the commercial media. It is probably condemned to remain indefinitely, like the Russian intelligentsia in the nineteenth century, a helpless spectator of the disturbing course of its nation's life."

—GEORGE F. KENNAN
"The Last Wise Man," April, 1989

"Just beyond the horizon of current events lie two possible political futures—both bleak, neither democratic. The first is a retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed: a threatened Lebanonization of national states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe—a Jihad in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and civic mutuality. The second is being borne in on us by the onrush of economic and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize the world with fast music, fast computers, and fast food—with MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald's, pressing nations into one commercially homogenous global network: one McWorld tied together by technology, ecology, communications, and commerce. The planet is falling precipitantly apart *and* coming reluctantly together at the very same moment."

—BENJAMIN R. BARBER
"Jihad vs. McWorld," March, 1992





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LETTERS

Editors' Note

We regret that Garrison Keillor's new book, from which last month's cover story, "Talk Radio," was drawn, was misidentified on the magazine's cover. The book is *Wobegon Boy*; it was published last month by Viking Penguin.

Mosquito Problems

From Ellen Ruppel Shell's article "Resurgence of a Deadly Disease" (August *Atlantic*) it is clear that "the international funding picture" for malaria is "dismal" indeed, and that the disease continues to wreck the lives of multitudes everywhere. But if the "roughly \$85 million ... of public-sector funds" begrudged to it annually came to only "two cents for every reported case," then more than four billion people would be infected. Elsewhere Shell cites the World Health Organization's estimate that malaria "sickens as many as half a billion"—a more plausible number, and dire enough.

Christopher S. Mazzara

Cary, N.C.

Ellen Shell mentions the fruitless efforts to find a vaccine to prevent malaria and the near inevitability of contracting the disease in areas infested by the anopheles mosquito. She mentions the use of DDT during infestations in the Second World War, but she never mentions the use of atabrine.

During that war I was in New Guinea and several other South Pacific Islands for more than two years, and I never contracted malaria. Why not? I took atabrine tablets three times a day. Many men in my company contracted the disease, and it became common to say that atabrine did not help. The truth is that a great many of the soldiers refused to take atabrine, either because they did not believe in its effectiveness or because they did not like to take the pill. I believe

that none of the men who religiously took the pill contracted the disease.

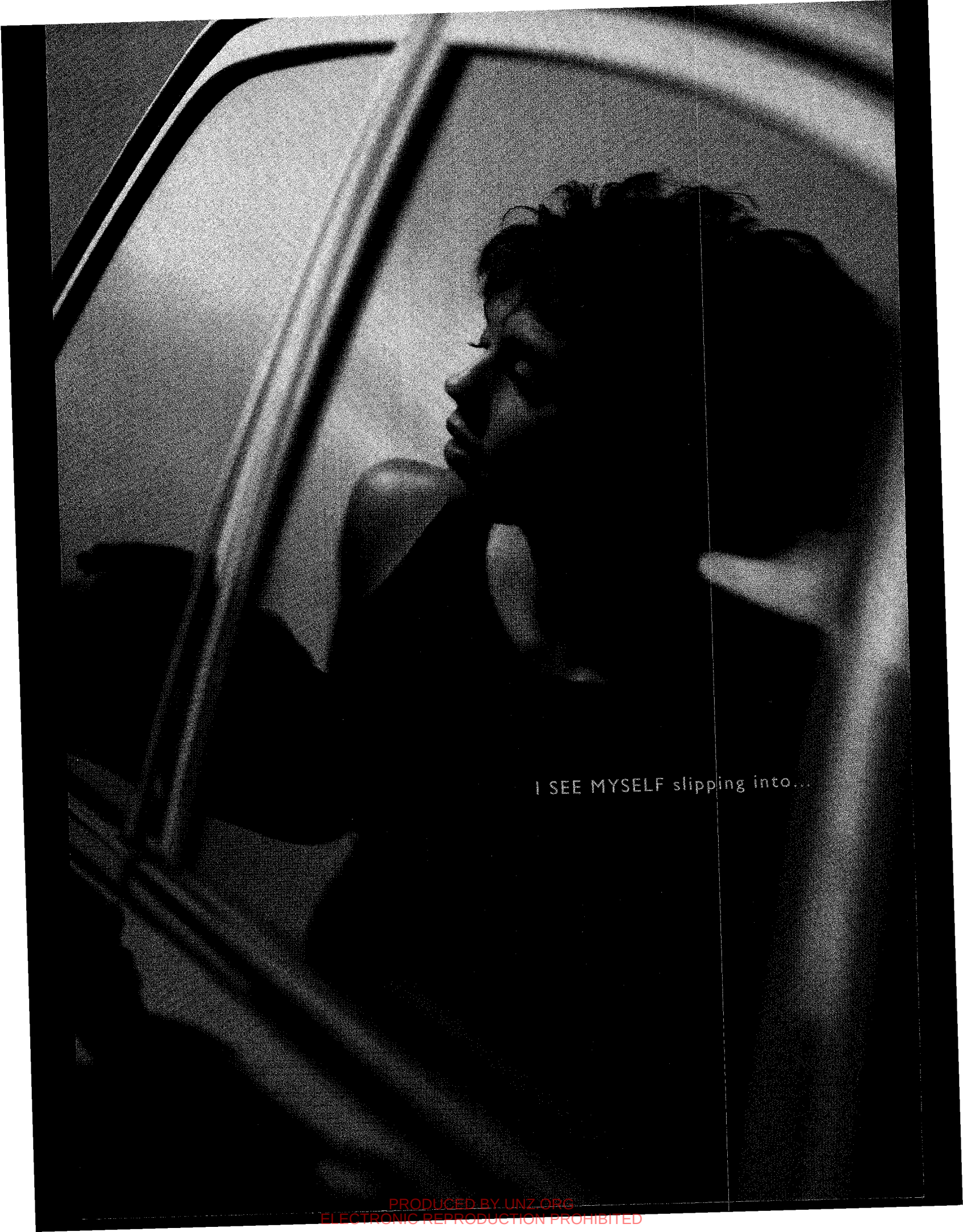
I would like to know why atabrine is not being used today where malaria is a problem. In time my skin became yellow, but that was better than contracting malaria.

Joseph L. Keller

Havre, Mont.

The article on malaria left me with several questions. If *Plasmodium* is such a mutable parasite, greater success in combating malaria might be had by focusing on the insect vector of the disease. Yet the opinions of entomologists were not prominent in the article; the only entomological solution discussed was the failed, ecologically disastrous DDT campaign (and similar programs) of some forty years ago. Admittedly, entomology does not have the cachet of medical research, and entomologists do not have the political clout or charisma to elicit billions of dollars to investigate troublesome bugs. But surely there are ways other than insecticides to control or eliminate malarial mosquitoes.

For example, only females are blood feeders, while the males derive their nourishment exclusively from plants. Do the males of malarial species eat from only certain plants? If so, can these plants be eliminated? Are they repelled by any plants—and, more critically, do the females also find these plants repellent? Perhaps one of these could serve as the basis for an earth-friendly mosquito repellent, one that could be developed into a lotion or even a soap. Or sterile males or females could be introduced en masse into the habitat to decrease the population of malarial mosquitoes. Since not every species of mosquito is capable of serving as a vector of malaria, large numbers of "malaria-resistant" mosquitoes or other insects could be released to compete with the malarial species in the same ecological niche without causing any decrease in the insectivore popula-



I SEE MYSELF slipping into...

...tailored shades of creme

going barefoot

wearing silk pajamas.

I see myself

mastering mountain golf

kayaking through

Class III rapids

moving to the rhythm of

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tion that is currently feeding on malarial mosquitoes. Is there any method that could enhance the success of species that are now predators of malarial mosquitoes? A program that combined several earth-friendly strategies against mosquitoes might prove cheaper and more effective than the glamorous but elusive vaccine against the parasite.

Mary Knight
New York, N.Y.

Ellen Ruppel Shell replies:

Christopher Mazzara is correct. The accurate figure is close to twenty cents—not two cents, as reported. My larger point, however, holds true: the amount of money spent on malaria cases worldwide is appallingly low.

Atabrine, the brand name for quina-craine or mepacrine, was introduced in 1932 and was the first synthetic anti-malaria drug. It was, as Joseph Keller recalls, used in the Second World War when quinine was in short supply. (The Japanese, as I mentioned in my article, stockpiled quinine during the war.) The drug is no longer used to prevent malaria because of its toxic effects, which include gastrointestinal disorders, skin loss, and disturbances in the central nervous system. Prolonged use can result in blood disorders and psychological disturbances. The drug's most obvious side effect is a yellow discoloration of the skin and urine. Today other, equally successful anti-malaria drugs that do not cause such side effects are available.

Regarding Mary Knight's letter: According to Professor John Edman, an entomologist at the University of Massachusetts, "the sterile-male technique has been used successfully against screw worm flies and fruit flies and has been demonstrated in field studies to work against mosquitoes. However, mosquitoes are so much more numerous that a Herculean effort would be required to release enough sterile males over an entire continent like Africa." Such a plan "might be feasible on smaller islands, but would still be very expensive."

Of the two entomological options for malaria control currently being field-tested or researched with great vigor, one is the use of bed nets (which I discussed in detail in my article). The other, says Professor Edman, is "flashier and involves engineering mosquitoes to be,

for example, resistant to the malaria parasite—and then releasing them into the wild population. The practicality and sustainability of such an approach is hotly debated among entomologists and geneticists, but it is attracting a large share of the research money devoted to research on biological vectors."

Teaching the Humanities

Deplorable and baffling as the race-gender-class approach to literature is, I find equally baffling Frank Kermode's notion that literature can and should be read in a kind of neutral trance ("The Academy vs. the Humanities," August *Atlantic*). Kermode says nothing of admiration. While objecting to the political agenda of the likes of Fredric Jameson and Stanley Fish, critics who should be read with disgust, Kermode apparently believes that Ezra Pound should not be so treated simply because he was a poet. The fact is, however, that Pound was nothing if not political, and, indeed, insisted that his fascist, racist, anti-Semitic filth was inextricable from his art. How, then, read such a person without disgust and disagreement? By Pound's own admission his art and his perverted ideas were one. So long as a poet's agenda is anything but art for art's sake, devoid of ideas of any consequence, he should no more escape moral and intellectual scrutiny than should the one-note race-gender-class critics. To suppose that *how* something is said is more important than *what* is said is as absurd as the idea that "the ultimate purpose of all study is political." If Pound is to be ultimately judged by his art, it follows that Jameson and his ilk should be judged by their rhetoric. Although art should be judged primarily on artistic grounds, reason demands that one first determine whether the thing to be judged is art, propaganda, or just plain trash. Humanities teachers who can't or won't make such distinctions are not worthy of their calling. I suspect that had a sufficient number of English professors had the courage and insight to separate the wheat from the chaff, instead of simply teaching literature as literature in a safe, neutral vacuum, the race-gender-class crowd never would have gained a foothold. Whether Pound was a great poet is a

matter of opinion. That much of his work is hateful, obscene propaganda is a matter of fact. As such it is no more deserving of a place in the humanities than the mindless maundering of the devotees of political correctness.

John Hendrickson
Spring City, Utah

Frank Kermode replies:

Another look at what I wrote might persuade John Hendrickson that he is wildly wrong to say that I recommended reading without disagreement. It is true that I don't recommend instant disgust, which seems to be something he relishes. The point I was trying to make, which he was apparently too disgusted to grasp, is surely very elementary: in certain respects there will always be disagreement. If you read Lucretius, you will be considering views on physics and religion with which you cannot possibly agree; few find Milton's theology acceptable; and Dante can be in various ways ethically or politically distasteful. All three nevertheless remain great poets in the opinion of most who can read them. Hendrickson's comment could give the impression that I discussed Ezra Pound at length, possibly in some kind of a trance; let me point out that he was mentioned only in passing in my review. However, since the matter has been raised, I will certify that I, too, deplore Pound's fascism and anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, as it happens, I think Hendrickson quite wrong to suggest that everything Pound wrote should evoke principled disgust in all honest readers. He seems unable to disagree without feeling disgust, but I can hardly be expected to regard that disability as my problem.

Computer Delusion

In "The Computer Delusion" (July *Atlantic*), Todd Oppenheimer uses two anecdotal stories to support his argument that some educational software, simulation programs in particular, "may be of questionable relevance." To back up this statement he argues that simulations are simplified and "built on hidden assumptions."

Maxis—the maker of the two programs he uses as examples—would be the first to agree with his statement about simpli-

fication. Even the most complex simulations can't come close to matching the complexity of the real world. Simulations, though, are very accurate on a broad scale and give users an opportunity to observe and experiment in otherwise impossible ways.

A child can dissect a frog in a classroom to learn about its structure or take a field trip to observe a local habitat. With SimPark, a simulation, players learn about ecosystems by creating one. Players pick plants and animals to fill their park. Those who build viable food webs and take into account the local climate will succeed. If their parks fail—perhaps species diversity was too low, or there weren't enough trees for birds to nest in—players usually return to find out why until they get their parks just as they envisioned them.

Far from being software that "fosters passivity, ultimately dulling people's sense of what they can change in the world," as Oppenheimer states, simulations give kids a sense of power and a feeling that they can make a difference.

Robin Harper

*Vice President of Marketing
Maxis
Walnut Creek, Calif.*

Most good educators realize that the best learning takes place in a multifaceted environment, with a variety of powerful teaching materials. Technology-haters like Clifford Stoll reject computers for education because "no computer can teach what a walk through a pine forest feels like." Of course not, although I'd argue that the filmstrips and videos Stoll maligns so much do a better job of capturing the experience than a teacher lecturing at a blackboard. Nobody is arguing for replacing real experiences with computerized ones. But when it comes to a study of outer space or the Australian outback, the real thing isn't always easy to visit. That's where video footage, or an E-mail exchange with an astronaut or a group of Australian schoolchildren, can improve on what kids might learn from a print encyclopedia alone.

It's ludicrous to blame word processors for the failure of schoolchildren to link ideas or develop relationships in their writing, just as it makes no sense to reject Internet research because some of what young people find on the Net is garbage.

In fact, these examples just illustrate that it is imperative for our schools to teach children (and teachers) to be discriminating citizens of the information age—to ask good questions and refuse to be fooled by surface appearances.

Judy Salpeter

*Editor, Technology & Learning
San Francisco, Calif.*

Todd Oppenheimer confuses the report McKinsey & Company produced for the National Information Infrastructure Advisory Council, "Connecting K-12 Schools to the Information Superhighway," with the report produced for the Clinton Administration by the council itself.

As its introduction clearly states, our report was independently prepared as a submission of information to the advisory council and as such does not represent the views or recommendations of the council or its members. We explicitly played the role of impartial fact-finder in conducting a detailed analysis of the economics of various options for deploying computer-based infrastructure in schools.

Oppenheimer dismisses our statement that the report "does not attempt to recommend specific public policy goals" or to "evaluate the relative merits of competing demands on educational funding." We deliberately did not take a stand on these issues in this report, although public policy and school-budgeting choices are clearly critical decisions. Instead our aim was to help the task force—which was charged with making such policy recommendations—to make better-informed decisions.

Oppenheimer also ignores our report's main conclusion: that with relatively modest increases in spending, a variety of educational benefits could be attained from the use of computers in classrooms—provided that technology investments are closely tied to teacher professional development, clear educational performance goals, support for school administrators in planning and budgeting, and increased awareness among community leaders on how to help schools and hold them accountable for results.

**Michael Nevens
Margot Singer**

*McKinsey & Company
New York, N.Y.*

Todd Oppenheimer replies:

The value of simulations like SimPark is questioned not only by me but also by several independent authorities on education and technology. The simplifications in the programs that Robin Harper describes should not be lightly dismissed. When children use simulations, the subtlety and unpredictability found in real life—complications that can be honestly studied in real-world inquiries—generally get distorted or ignored. This creates flawed experiments and bad lessons. That's what I and others mean by the dangers lying in simulations' hidden assumptions.

Judy Salpeter is partly right. Filmstrips, E-mail, the Internet, and even an occasional simulation can be helpful when used carefully and skeptically. Unfortunately, too many schools frantically gather all the machinery they can and then corrupt their curricula to squeeze it in. In truth, these technologies don't diminish the need for other study—they intensify it, while crowding out time for it. Even good programs cause problems simply by accumulation. Technology creates an addiction to gear, as the demands for constant upgrades, maintenance, and training swallow ever larger amounts of time and money. This often sidelines old-fashioned but time-tested forms of study, particularly those that attend to human values over mechanical ones.

Michael Nevens and Margot Singer may call their document an impartial accumulation of facts. But the McKinsey report that the Clinton Administration received and circulated does not read that way. Each chapter emphasizes various ways to get more computers into classrooms, while virtually ignoring the many negative studies and problematic consequences involved.

Zero

I read with interest the article "Zero," by Dick Teresi, in the July *Atlantic*. Teresi raised many interesting points, among them one I hadn't thought about before, as I am not an astronomer or a historian—namely, the difficulty that people in these two professions have in calculating years over the zero point.

I have trouble conceiving of a year named "zero." Sure, NASA launches

Hepatitis B infects more
than 40 million

Global Tuberculosis Epidemic
Approaches 9 Million

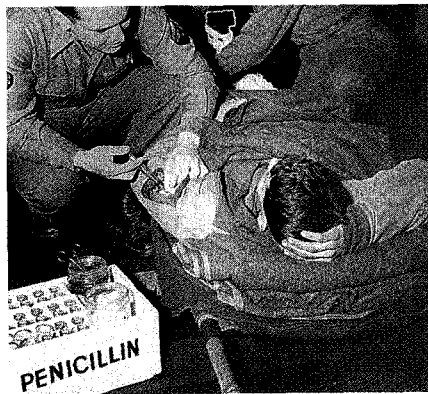
RESURGENCE
OF MALARIA REPORTED

There is only one
way to **prevent** the next
EPIDEMIC.

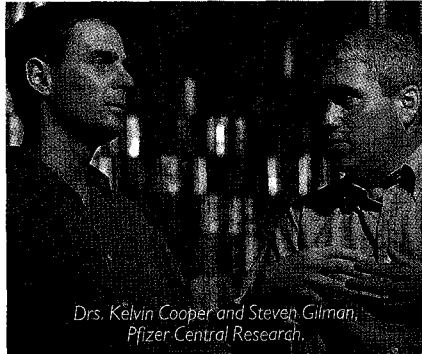
For more than 3 million years, the human race battled nonstop against microbes, or, as most of us know them, germs. And for millennia, microbes won. Waves of plague, typhus, influenza and other infectious diseases left death and suffering in their wake. For most of human existence, life expectancy was short and child mortality high.

Finally, just 200 years ago, humankind scored its first victory when Dr. Edward Jenner successfully immunized 8-year-old farm boy James Phipps against smallpox. Another 132 years passed before the next real advance—the discovery of penicillin in 1928 by Dr. Alexander Fleming.

Fleming's discovery marked the dawn of modern medicine. But because it was impossible to make



We will win battles. But the war against microbes will never end.



penicillin in any significant quantity, it wasn't widely available until 1944, when a company called Pfizer pioneered its mass production, just in time to save the lives of thousands of U.S. servicemen in WW II.

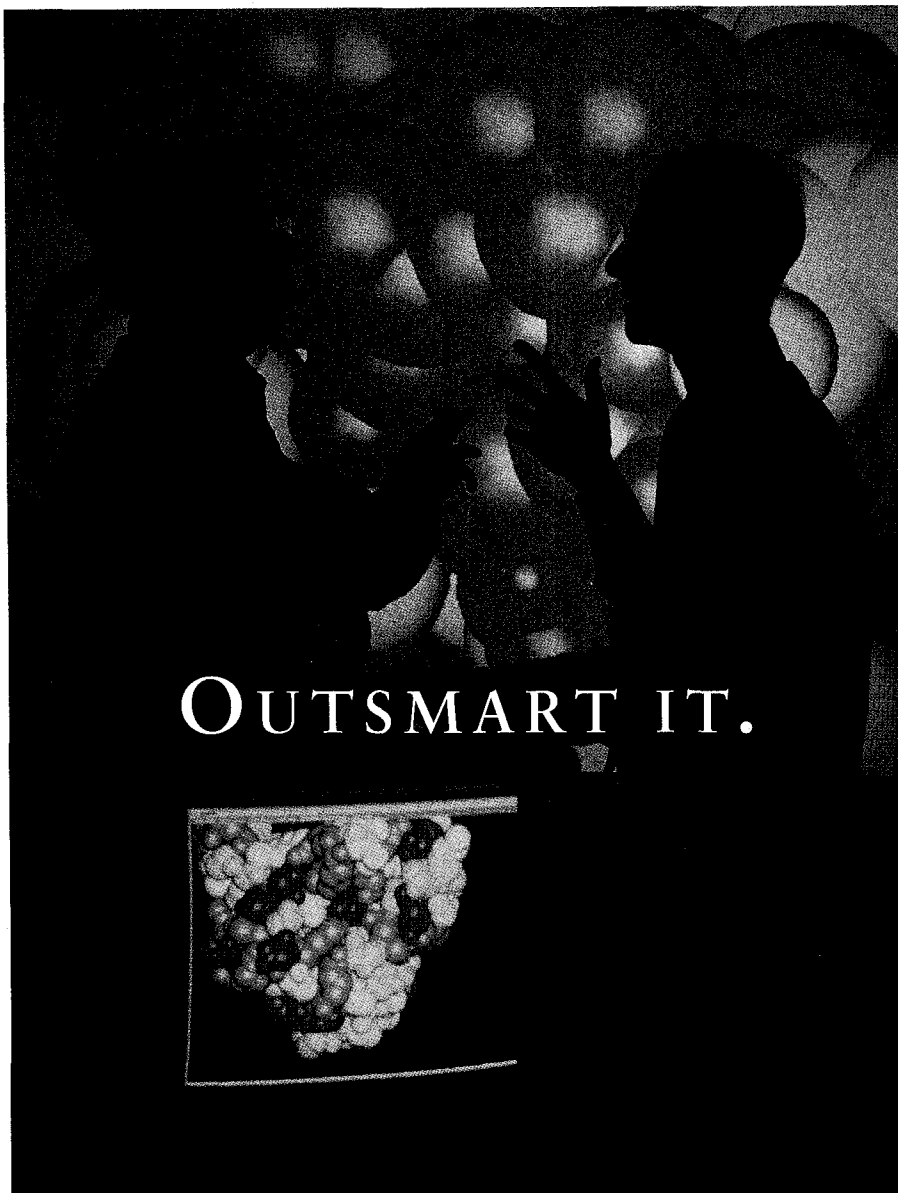
Over the next two decades, the

dramatic success of penicillin and of subsequent vaccines and antibiotics led us to believe we could control or cure anything. After all, we'd seen polio virtually vanquished and had neutralized the threat of measles, whooping cough and diseases such as influenza and pneumonia that were once killers. By the late 1960's, when then U.S. Surgeon General William Stewart announced that we could "close the book" on infectious disease, he echoed a sentiment widely held throughout the country.

He could not have been more wrong. Today we face AIDS, Ebola, Lyme disease—diseases unrecognized a generation ago. And some infectious diseases, including tuberculosis and the more common bacterial pneumonia,

Pfizer's development of a method to mass-produce penicillin saved the lives of thousands of U.S. servicemen in WW II.

541	1590	1676	1683	1796	1862
Bubonic plague kills 10,000 daily	Microscope invented	Microorganisms seen for first time	First bacteria discovered	Edward Jenner discovers smallpox inoculation	Pasteur links germs to specific diseases for first time



OUTSMART IT.

all too frequently mutate to form resistance to traditional antibiotics.

Kelvin Cooper, Ph.D., director of immunology and infectious disease research at Pfizer Inc's Central Research division in Groton, Connecticut, puts the current situation into perspective: "Microbes are the perfect evolutionary mecha-

nisms. The lightning speed with which they can adapt gives them a great advantage in our efforts to control them. A single human generation spans about 20 years, but bacteria produce a new generation every 20 minutes. We can never underestimate their ability to evolve resistant strains."

Despite the Rambo-like survival skills of microbes, Steven C. Gilman, Ph.D., assistant director of Pfizer's immunology and infectious disease effort, is confident. "I don't agree with the apocalyptic view that the plague is once again at our door. But I do believe we must be preemptive. The failure in the 70's and 80's to realize how 'smart' bacteria can be planted the seeds of our current problems."

A decade ago, when many pharmaceutical companies radically cut back or entirely abandoned antibiotic development, Pfizer scientists continued the work that had made the company a renowned leader in anti-infective research.

After the success of penicillin and other medicines, we started to believe we could cure anything.

1865	1892	1928	1944	1952
First surgical disinfectant reduces death rate from 45% to 15%	First virus discovered	Penicillin discovered, but only available in small amounts	First-ever mass-produced penicillin, from Pfizer	Salk discovers polio vaccine

MICROBES

INVISIBLE INVADERS AMAZING ALLIES

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a new traveling museum exhibition sponsored by Pfizer. Experience the good, the bad and the funny-looking when the world of microbes comes to life at this kid-friendly, hands-on learning environment.

Exhibit will run through Fall 2002. For more information, please visit the *Microbes* Web page at www.pfizer.com/rd/microbes.

Ontario Science Centre
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Sept. 27, 1997 through
Jan. 4, 1998

Liberty Science Center
Jersey City, New Jersey

Jan. 24, 1998 through
May 3, 1998

Natural History Museum
of Los Angeles County
Los Angeles, California

May 23, 1998 through
Sept. 7, 1998

California Academy of
Sciences
San Francisco, CA

Oct. 3, 1998 through
January 10, 1999

"Our programs are science driven," says Gilman. "While some companies thought the battle had been won, Pfizer listened to its scientists, who continued to be concerned about antibiotic resistance and believed our problems were far from over."

Today Pfizer's scientists are

exploring novel strategies to hold bugs at bay. One of the most promising involves the use of new discoveries about genes to craft the next generation of cures.

With a California company, Microcide, Pfizer scientists are designing an antibiotic to target the genes essential to microbes'

survival. "This started with a project to find all the essential genes bacteria need to live," explains Kelvin Cooper. "They've been found. Now we're designing drugs to attack them." Pfizer and Millennium Pharmaceuticals have formed a similar partnership, which is using genetic science to search for better antifungal medications.

Hopefully, after further research and development, these new forms of treatment will be available and humanity once again will have scored a major victory against infection.

But Steve Gilman adds a final word of caution: "We must always remain dedicated to research. It's the only way to stay one step ahead. We will win battles. But the war against harmful microbes will never end."

We must always remain dedicated to research. It's the only way to stay one step ahead.

1965

First synthetic
antibiotic

1979

World Health
Organization
proclaims the end of
smallpox

1996

Signs of microbial
life found on Mars



We're part of the cure.

www.pfizer.com
AOL keyword: Pfizer

rockets at zero, but what do they call the second immediately before or after the launch? The zero'th second? I don't think so. They probably call it the *first* second. Likewise, the first mile on Teresi's fine German automobile would be the *first* mile (or mile one), and not the zero'th mile (or mile zero). Would a man introduce his second wife as his first wife, saying, "This is my new wife, June. She loves me so much—unlike my zero'th wife, May"?

To my way of thinking, leaving things as they are makes the most sense. Zero is a void, nothingness; how can it be used to designate a period of time? The Maya thought that zero marked both the *beginning* and the *completion* of a cycle, not a segment of time. A line contains an infinite number of points. One of those points is the zero point, a mark of the *beginning* of the A.D. cycle and the *completion* of the B.C. cycle. Jesus can be found here, too, for he said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega."

Karl F. Meyer
St. Marys, Kans.

Dick Teresi has hopelessly confounded cardinal and ordinal numbers, and his "problem" of the millennium dissolves when these concepts are properly understood.

Ordinal numbers, which the Gregorian calendar uses, indicate sequence. Thus "A.D. 1" (or the *first* year A.D.) refers to the year that begins at the zero point and ends one year later. Think of a carpenter's ruler, if you will; the *first inch* is the interval between the edge and the one-inch mark. Thus the millennium will end with the passing of the two-thousandth year, not with its inception.

Cardinal numbers, which astronomers use in their calculations, indicate quantity. Zero is a cardinal number and indicates a value; it does not name an interval. Thus "zero" indicates the division between B.C. and A.D., not the interval of the first year before or after this point. Continuing with our example, put two rulers end to end: although there is a zero point, there is no "zero'th" inch.

As it stands now, we refer to years with ordinal numbers and to ages with cardinal numbers. Thus a child less than a year old is usually said to be so many weeks or months old, rather than "zero years old." If we changed over to this

system for our calendar (referring to the *age* of our era, rather than to the *order* of the year), then there would be "zero years" for both A.D. and B.C.! That is to say, the last twelve months before the birth of Christ and the first twelve months after the birth of Christ would be the years 0 B.C. and A.D. 0 respectively.

Under no system of enumeration, cardinal or ordinal, could you have only one year numbered zero.

R. M. Schultz
Chicago, Ill.

Dick Teresi does a good job of explaining the history of the zero but a bad job of understanding the concept. Zero is a placeholder on a continuum. If I have no money but owe no money, you cannot describe this situation without a zero. You cannot say that I have \$1 (+1) or that I owe \$1 (−1).

The zero in counting time refers to the starting point. When I was born (or in some cultures when I was conceived) is the zero point. When I have lived 365 days, I am not zero years old. I have lived one year. I am one year old. To believe otherwise is to believe that zero equals one.

In the case of Jesus Christ (disregarding the four-year error made by Dionysus), the day he was born is zero. The day he was born, he began the first year of his life, not the zero year of his life. The year before he was born was the first year before Christ, not the zero year before Christ. Teresi's arguments about Kings' reigns are sophistry, not mathematics.

Bill Baird
Fruita, Colo.

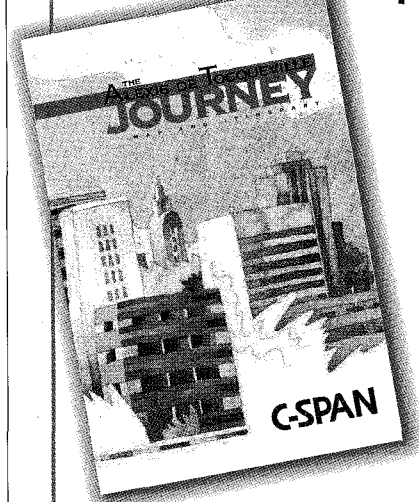
Dick Teresi replies:

Karl Meyer's logic—that zero is "nothingness," and therefore cannot designate a period of time—is classic Greek logic, which, however, is not consistent with sound mathematics.

Mr. Meyer rejects zero by subscribing to a time line in which zero is not assigned to any increment, just as in the Bede-Dionysus B.C. and A.D. numbering scheme. The increment (year) to the right of zero, Meyer says, is 1, and to the left is 1 B.C. (or −1).

3	2	1	0	1	2	3
3 B.C.	2 B.C.	1 B.C.	1 A.D.	2 A.D.	3 A.D.	
-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	

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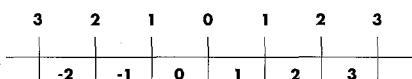


Tocqueville
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Zero in this scheme becomes a numerical “continental divide,” the numbers flowing east and west, as it were, and zero itself being deprived of its own increment. The flaw in this logic can best be seen by substituting another year for 0, say 1997, on his time line. Now all other years flow east and west. To the left of 1997 we number the increment 1996; to the right 1998. Voilà! I’ve made 1997 disappear. Using the above scheme we can “disappear” any year.

So where would we put a year 0? Mathematically, if one is to label increments on a number line (as is done on a calendar), the increments take on the number of the line to their left or right. Which you choose doesn’t matter, but you must be consistent. The number-line increments below are numbered to the left. Jacques Cassini renumbered the calendar this way, renaming 1 B.C. year 0, 2 B.C. year -1, and so on.



The mistake Mr. Meyer has made is one

of inconsistency. He switched his numbering system from right to left when he hit zero. Zero thus gets no increment. This is wrong. Zero is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the other integers. The Meyer line mirrors the Venerable Bede’s calendar, but we can let Bede off the hook, because he had no 0 to play with.

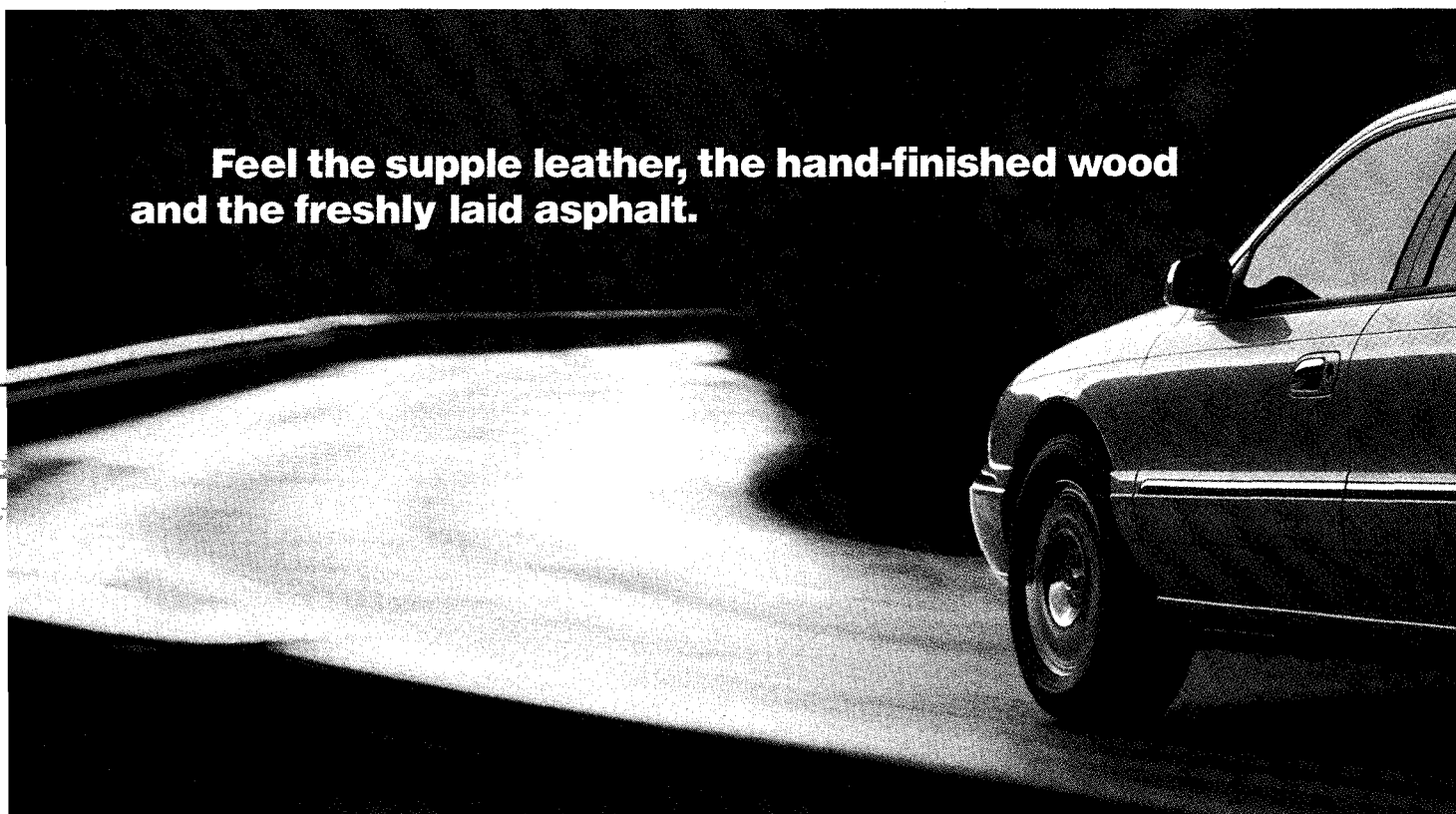
R. M. Schultz contends that the numbers of the years are ordinal numbers, not cardinal numbers. This is true. That’s the point. Ordinals are numbers in *ordered succession*, and what we are trying to do is put the years in an ordered sequence. It is true also that zero isn’t normally considered an ordinal except in rare cases (zero’th). Neither are negative numbers. When Cassini replaced B.C. years with negative years, I suspect he was just trying to make the best of a bad situation, using negative years as a means of distinguishing them from A.D. years. He could have called them “left” and “right” or “Fred” and “Ethel.” Again, ordinal numbers denote ordered succession. The Bede-Dionysus calendar violates order by skipping a number, zero.

Concerning Bill Baird’s contention that zero is merely “a placeholder on a continuum”: the Babylonians are credited with being the first (zero’th?) civilization to use a placeholder, but the actual naming of zero didn’t take place until the first century A.D., in India and in the Mayan empire. According to the number theorist Tobias Dantzig, many cultures had counting boards—abacuses and similar devices—that used place systems represented by columns of numbers. But mathematics did not advance significantly until the “empty column,” as Dantzig called it, was given a symbol, a name: zero.

Euthanasia and Abortion

In her reply to Mary Vassar Hitchings (Letters, August *Atlantic*), Katha Pollitt ridicules Ms. Hitchings’s suggestion that arguments for legalized abortion could be used to support euthanasia for the sick and the old. Yet this year, when the Supreme Court was called upon to de-

**Feel the supple leather, the hand-finished wood
and the freshly laid asphalt.**



It’s difficult to say which sensation is the most pleasing in the newly restyled Lincoln Continental. Is it the feeling of being surrounded by plush leather trim and classic bird’s-eye maple? Or the feeling of confidently carving your way through a favorite turn, with an



cide whether there was a constitutional right to assisted suicide, proponents of such a right relied heavily on *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the cases in which the Court found and reaffirmed the right to abortion.

Roe and *Casey* proclaimed that private, autonomous choice over fundamental questions of life and death was better for both the woman (who would decide what burdens she could bear) and the entity being killed (who would be spared a poor quality of life if unwanted or disabled). Similarly, proponents of assisted suicide argued that the alleged right was necessary both to protect families from the burden of caring for the patient and to protect the patient from a poor quality of life.

The same errors corrupt this argument in each instance. First, the private choice-maker may choose death for another in bad faith, out of a selfish desire to be unencumbered by unchosen duties to others. Second, and more important, the emphasis on private choice allows society to take a cheap way out: instead of investing time and money to alleviate

the problems that motivate such a terrible decision—investing in jobs, welfare, pain management, health care—we give people the “right” to end lives that burden themselves or others.

Since feminists like Pollitt uncritically accepted this cop-out as a solution to women’s problems, abortion, rather than public assistance and private responsibility, has become the accepted cost-effective solution to unwanted pregnancy. Now the same bad arguments, for the same reasons, are being advanced to justify similar abandonment of the sick and the old. Luckily, the Court has learned from its mistakes. Why hasn’t Pollitt?

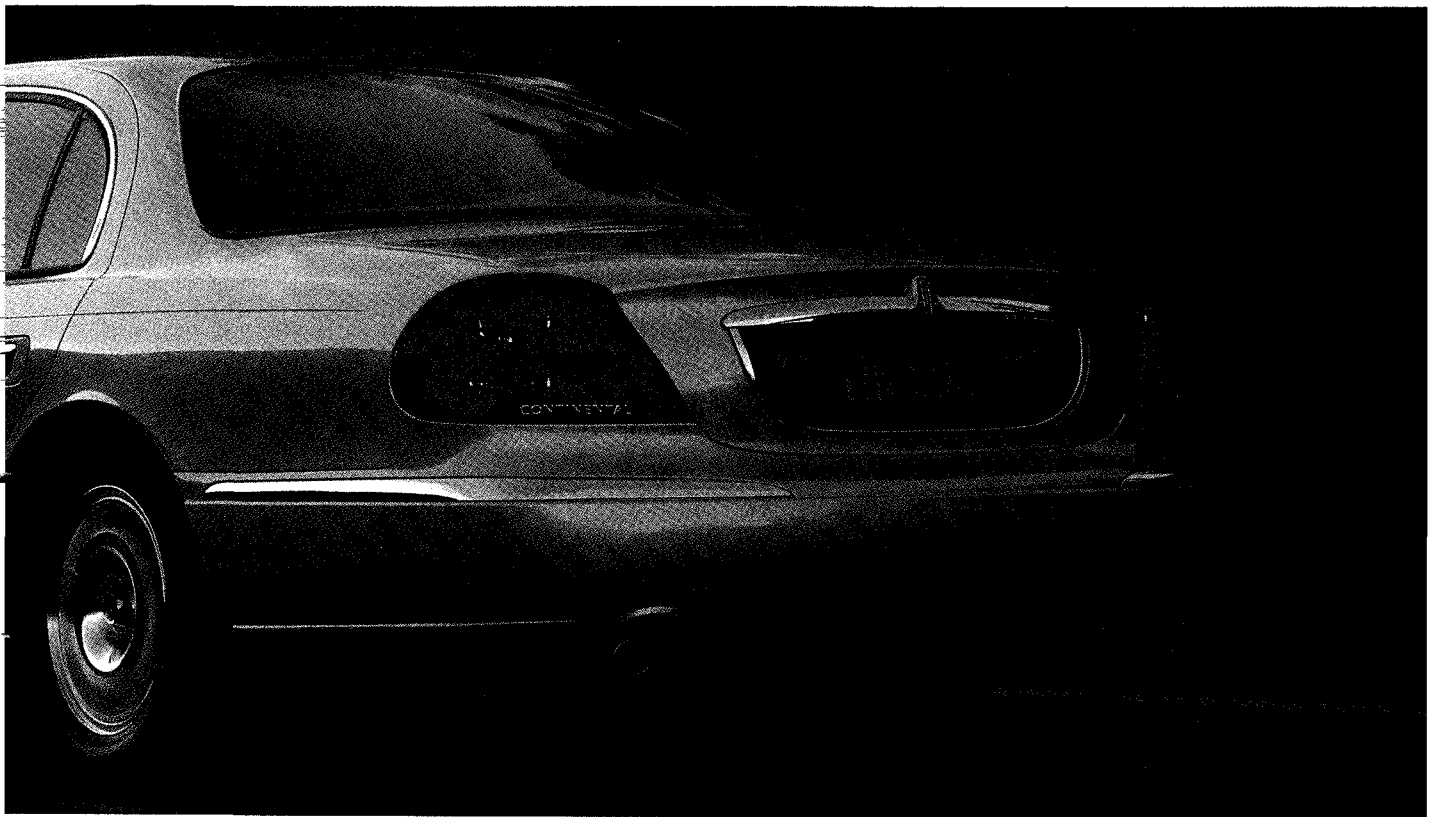
Jendi B. Reiter
New York, N.Y.

Katha Pollitt replies:

Whatever one thinks of assisted suicide—which, Jendi Reiter notes, has been defended on grounds drawn from abortion-rights decisions—it is not the same as euthanasia, much less the outright murder Ms. Hinchings posited arranging for her aged parents. To equate these acts with abortion is possible only if you

believe that the fertilized egg, the embryo, and the fetus are the moral equivalent of your mother. But this is exactly the point at issue, isn’t it? Millions of Americans have had or helped others to have abortions, when doing so was legal and when it was not. Hardly any have killed their parents, or anyone else. This suggests to me that having an unwanted pregnancy is not very much like being the adult child of an elderly parent, is not experienced as such by those who actually face these situations, and is not so regarded by American society.

Jendi Reiter suggests that legalizing abortions permits society to avoid addressing the reasons why women have them. Yet, interestingly, the countries that do the most for women and children—the European social-welfare states—all permit abortion, and even pay for it in their nationalized health plans. The countries that do the least—most Latin American nations, for example—forbid it. In our own country the criminalization of abortion did not lead to caring social policies in the hundred years it was in force. Why should it do so now?



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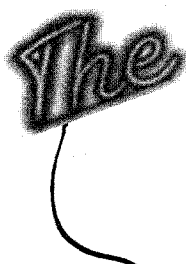
thing called the Internet.

small this means a quicker, more reliable, more secure way of doing business on the Internet. In fact, GTE Internetworking provides the only Web hosting service that has a

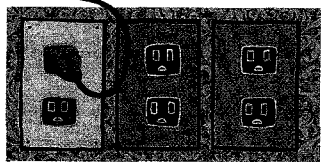
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NOVEMBER ALMANAC



Government

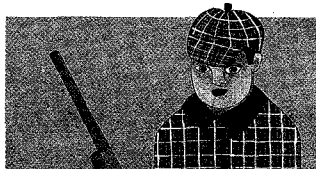
November 1: Starting today Californians may file requests to opt out of the service provided by their local electric companies and sign up with any of a host of providers coming on the scene, many from out of state. This is the first of several steps in California's plan to deregulate its electric utilities and end the state-granted monopolies. Service from the new providers will start no sooner than January 1. California was the first state to legislate a system that permits retail competition in its electricity market; 13 other states have since either passed bills or supported rules that call for opening their electricity markets in a similar fashion. 10: The first White House conference ever held on hate crimes takes place today, bringing together victims, legislators, religious leaders, and police officers to discuss existing laws against hate crimes and ways to improve enforcement. The conference has been billed as part of President Bill Clinton's yearlong initiative on race relations, although crimes directed against a person's religion, nationality, sex, or sexual orientation will also be considered.

Arts & Letters

This could be a record month for art sales, with the rival auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's both holding significant auctions in New York. During the course of the month Christie's will offer 115 twentieth-century paintings, drawings, and prints from the estate of the art collectors Victor and Sally



Ganz. The collection is valued at more than \$125 million—the highest total ever estimated for the sale of a single collection. The sale will include works by Picasso, Jasper Johns, and Frank Stella. On the 12th Sotheby's will auction 45 paintings and sculptures from the estate of the philanthropist and hotel owner Evelyn Sharp. This collection, which is expected to bring some \$60 million, includes works by Matisse, Modigliani, and Picasso. Some experts worry that these auctions, along with those regularly scheduled for the fall, are more than the market can bear.

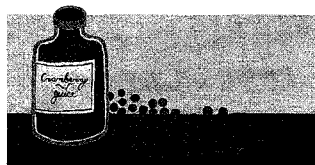


Health & Safety

Deer-hunting season is in full swing in many states this month. Deer are not the only ones who should be wary: according to a study conducted recently at the William Beaumont Hospital, in Royal Oak, Michigan, poorly conditioned hunters are at risk for cardiac complications, including heart attacks, sparked by "buck fever," or the excitement felt while hunting. The study found that heart rates increased drastically when subjects killed or simply sighted a deer; they were also elevated while hunters dragged their kills to their vehicles or camps. For example, one hunter's heart rate rose from 78 to 168 beats per minute after a buck came into view. Even after hunters are literally out of the woods, their health may still be in peril: arterial plaque dislodged by the rigors of hunting may cause blockage, and a heart attack, up to several days later. In response to these findings, doctors in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, have set up screening centers outside sporting-goods stores to try to identify hunters particularly at risk.

Demographics

November 28: The holiday mailing season begins today, the day after Thanksgiving; some 5 billion cards and letters will be delivered in the U.S. between now and Christmas. Expediting the process this year will be "remote computer readers"—electronic devices designed to read hand-addressed mail. RCRs have been installed in some 250 postal centers, and are expected to be able to read at least a quarter of the hand-addressed mail. They will put a bar code on each piece, so that the mail can be sorted automatically. For those hand-addressed pieces on which the penmanship defies electronic deciphering, the Postal Service will use another new system, whereby computer images of addresses are sent electronically to regional encoding centers, whose employees will look at the images and enter the information needed to assign a bar code.



Food

November is the peak month for cranberry sales, owing, of course, to Thanksgiving. Demand for cranberries has been growing: for example, cranberry juice now ranks third in U.S. juice sales, behind apple and orange juice. The number of cranberry farmers is increasing, along with the number and size of cranberry bogs. However, creating new bogs is a slow, expensive process that is often thwarted by environmental regulations designed to protect wetlands. Farmers worry that the regulations could drive the industry abroad, even though cranberries are a North American taste: the vast majority of all cranberries are not only grown but consumed in the U.S. and Canada.



The Skies

November 4: Mars and Venus lie close together, near the crescent Moon, low on the southwestern horizon after sunset. 7: The waxing Moon passes above Jupiter in the southern sky. 11: After sunset in the southeastern and Gulf Coast states, southern New Jersey, and Cape Cod, Saturn will be occulted—hidden from view—by the Moon. 14: Full Moon, also known this month as the Frosty or Beaver Moon.

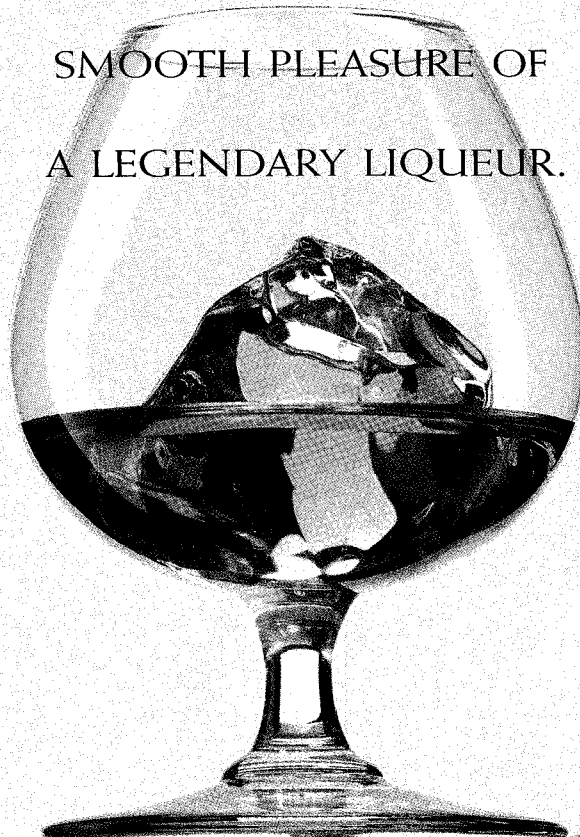
50 Years Ago

Budd Schulberg, writing in the November, 1947, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "To most Hollywood executives, the safest stories still seem to be those which do the people's dreaming for them. . . . Away from your troubles, away from your responsibilities and your punch-in-punch-out monotony, you sit there in the enveloping darkness and let DeMille or some other genius of mediocrity spin out for you a million-dollar dream. The homely secretary takes off her glasses and blossoms into a beautiful woman and the ideal mate for the boss. The rich and spoiled but beautiful heiress meets her match in an even more headstrong man of the people. The efficient and successful career woman who has forgotten that she is a woman is reminded of the fact by a forceful gent who puts her back in the home, where, it turns out, she wanted to be all along. Just in the nick of time, the villain is caught, the game is won, the show goes on."



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DNA Fatigue

Worn out by a nucleotidal wave

BY the time DNA testing finally brought confirmation, or something close to it, a few months ago, most paleo-anthropologists had already come around to the view that Neanderthal people, though humanoid and sentient and perhaps even sentimental, were not direct ancestors of modern human beings but instead represented a side branch and an evolutionary dead end. Still, the genetic investigation was remarkable. Scientists first extracted an uncontaminated sequence of DNA from the original Neanderthal skeleton, a fossilized specimen discovered in Germany in 1956. They then compared that sequence with corresponding sequences in *Homo sapiens*. Because genetic mutations build up naturally within any species over time, at a rate that can be estimated, comparing parallel DNA sequences yields a snapshot of genetic closeness or distance. The comparison also allows an estimate of the date when related species began to diverge. In the case of the Neanderthals and us, according to DNA tests the two phyla began to separate 600,000 years ago. Despite the suspicions that we all entertain, little or no interbreeding appears to have occurred.

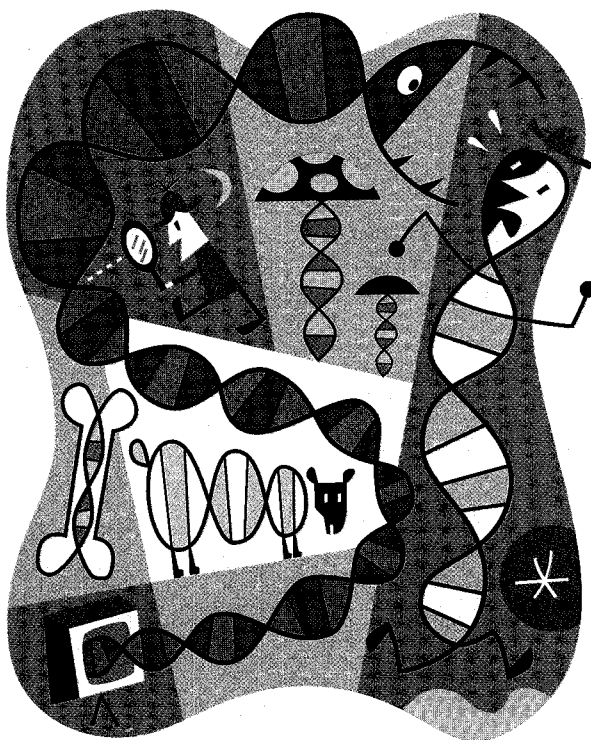
Shortly after learning about the Neanderthals, I happened to watch an installment of the CNN public-affairs program *Crossfire*, and a question came idly to mind. Might there be some way, analogous to the methods used in biology, to evaluate the buildup of mutations in the cultural sphere? The distinguished hosts of the *Crossfire* installment were John Sununu, a former chief of staff to the President of the United States, and Geraldine Ferraro, a former Democratic nominee for the office of Vice President, and on this day Sununu and Ferraro had as a guest the model-

actor-caretaker-opportunist Kato Kaelin, with whom they discussed the difficulty of finding a buyer for O. J. Simpson's house in Los Angeles. (Sununu: "Kato Kaelin, you lived in this facility. You know these are supposedly great buildings with beautiful grounds, pool and all. How come nobody bid?" Kaelin: "Well, I think it's the way they did it, John.") I would

be interested in knowing what the genetic analysis of a sequence from this improbable program would reveal. Is it culturally of a piece with the larger continuum—showing somehow an evolutionary affinity, despite some mutations, with samples extracted from Austen, Disraeli, and Kant? Or are the mutations significant enough as to indicate a parallel but distinct phylum, one that split off sometime prior to the Renaissance, say, or even prior to development of the prehensile thumb?

No doubt we'll never know—and perhaps we should be grateful. Fascinating as genetic analysis can be, I must confess to increasingly frequent epi-

sodes of what might be called DNA fatigue—a kind of irritable lassitude brought on by DNA's prominent involvement in almost everything. Deoxyribonucleic acid, the blueprint of life, enjoys the status of truth serum and Delphic oracle, judge and jury, architect and master builder, talisman and philosopher's stone. It brooks no argument. "Evidence from archaeology and palaeontology is seldom clear-cut," an editorial writer observed in the journal *New Scientist* after the Neanderthal findings were published, "whereas DNA research seems to provide unequivocal answers." Medieval mystics professed an awesome wonder at seeing the hand of God apparent in all things—in the concourse of the cosmos, a blade of grass, the evanescence



by Cullen Murphy

Illustration by Michael Bartalos

NOVEMBER 1997

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of a snowflake, the breath of a gnat. The sin these mystics had to fight, commentators say, was weariness at all the reminding.

The reminders of DNA are no less constant. *Jurassic Park*. Dolly the sheep. Almost any publicized criminal trial. Exhumations to obtain telltale genetic fingerprints now seem to take place every other week. Jesse James has been dug up for this purpose, as has the possibly innocent convicted murderer Sam Sheppard. DNA analysis was employed to confirm that bones found in a shallow grave in Ekaterinburg, Russia, were those of Czar Nicholas II and his family, executed in 1918. Potential claimants have raised the prospect of exhuming DNA from the rock star Jimi Hendrix and from the Argentine dictator Juan Perón, in each case with a view to establishing paternity. Queen Victoria remains a target of investigators, because the genetic source of the hemophilia she passed on to her descendants has never been satisfactorily explained. (There is no record of hemophilia in her parents' families, and some speculate that her mother may have taken a lover. If Victoria was illegitimate, researchers say, the British monarch today should be Prince Ernst August of Hanover, the grandson of Kaiser Wilhelm II.)

The relevance of DNA testing is nearly boundless. It led not long ago to the realization that an expanse of mushrooms in Michigan covering some forty acres was in fact a single organism—a fungus, mostly underground, that weighs upwards of a hundred tons. Textual archaeologists are hoping that DNA from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written on animal skins, can help to match up hundreds of orphaned fragments. In France and England investigators have used DNA testing of mass populations to find criminal suspects who match the evidence in hand. Genetic tests now exist to predict almost 500 medical conditions. As is well known, DNA has also been implicated in predispositions ranging from sadness and shyness to aggressiveness and novelty-seeking.

A novelty-seeking gene would help to explain the emergence of DNA kitsch. People have been carrying DNA around for millions of years, usually without even knowing it; now one can display one's DNA in amulet form. A mail-order company called Third Millennium Research, in Seattle, will for \$55 stabilize and preserve a sample of DNA obtained from a person's skin cells and send the sample back in a glass capsule. "Pass your unique collection of genes on to the future," the company's brochure advises. There is no reason to restrict the procedure to one's own genetic blueprint. The biochemist Kary Mullis, a pioneer in the science of DNA manipulation and the winner of the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1993, last year announced plans to sell a limited-edition pocket watch containing the DNA of Abraham Lincoln (from a lock of hair). If this prototype proves successful, the line might be expanded to include jewelry with DNA from Einstein, Elvis, Fred Astaire, and Napoleon.

So far DNA investigation has remained primarily in the hands of adults. But proliferation is only a matter of time. In the small town where I live—and my town can hardly have

taken the lead—a number of parents this summer sent their children away to something called DNA Camp, where a biotechnician imparted skills and knowledge that most adults will never possess. As part of the camp experience the campers compared DNA and proteins extracted from store-bought chicken nuggets with DNA and proteins extracted from store-bought chicken parts. "The students discovered," according to a terse account of one experiment published in the local newspaper, that "while some of the proteins from the two samples matched up, there were some additional, mystery proteins in the nuggets."

■ ■ ■

For all the insights that DNA provides, does it ever warm the heart? The only case that comes to mind is that of Cheddar Man, a 9,000-year-old skeleton found a century ago in a cave near the village of Cheddar, in England, and now reposing in boxes at London's Natural History Museum. A genetic assay recently determined that Cheddar Man is the direct ancestor of a forty-two-year-old schoolteacher named Adrian Targett, who was born just a few miles from the cave, and whose family has lived in the Cheddar area for, well, generations.

Cheddar Man's family saga is an uplifting affirmation of the possibility of stasis in the face of corrosive change. But stories like his will do little to deflect the backlash against DNA—against what the philosopher Philip Kitcher calls "genetalk"—that for a variety of reasons seems sure to come. Many people are already perturbed by the determinism that genetics can imply, many others by the invitation to tampering or misuse. More numerous by far, I suspect, are the ranks of those afflicted simply with some stage of DNA fatigue.

It is not incurable. One person I know has sought to banish all considerations of DNA from ordinary life in favor of what he calls the "baked-potato paradigm" of human biomass, which holds that thinking of people as consisting of a firm but indistinguishable pulp, rather than as a variegated amalgam of nucleotides, will actually get one through most days just fine. I have seen the baked-potato paradigm win immediate converts whenever it has been explained (although a few observers worry that the concept of DNA may sneak back in through the idea of "toppings"), and have come to appreciate its utility and its simplicity.

Another response to DNA fatigue might be to set aside large tracts of genetic ignorance as wilderness preserves. The ancients understood that too much knowledge could actually impede human functioning—this at a time when the encroachments on global nescience were comparatively few. Today ignorance preserves would be valuable not only as crucial reservoirs of psychodiversity but also as sources of solace and replenishment for those beset by an ever-increasing burden of knowledge and insight.

Does the baked-potato paradigm have a future? Should the need for a Terra Incognita National Wilderness Area be emphasized in public schools? I look forward to hearing the discussion among Geraldine, Kato, and John. ☼

what if my brother
makes me
eat a bug?

what if I need x-rays?

what if I'm
sick of all the
paperwork?

what if something
happens on
vacation?

what if?

what if my baby comes early?

what if I need to bring my weight
down because my cholesterol is up?

what if I want a cost effective HMO?

what if my kids need shots?

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A Democrat Who Admits It

Richard Gephardt is unafraid to say that the government should spend money on big public programs—things that other Democrats said before they echoed Republicans

THROUGH most of his career Richard Gephardt has seemed earnest, and therefore wooden. His problem has been like Al Gore's. But Gephardt is on the verge of having a provocative political case to make, and he may make it against Gore in the next two years—if Gephardt decides that the cost, fatigue, and potential humiliation of another long-shot bid

by James Fallows

for the presidency are worthwhile. (Like Gore, Gephardt lost to Michael Dukakis in the Democratic primary in 1988. Unlike Gore, he had the story of his campaign told in Richard Ben Cramer's wonderful account of several participants in the 1988 race, *What It Takes*. That book, published in 1992, is the best account available of Gephardt's personal history, professional back-

ground, and operating style.) Whether or not Gephardt runs again for President, whether or not the Democrats regain control of the House, allowing him to move from minority leader to speaker, his current ideas help to explain the next major source of tension within the Democratic Party and an issue sure to affect the next presidential race.

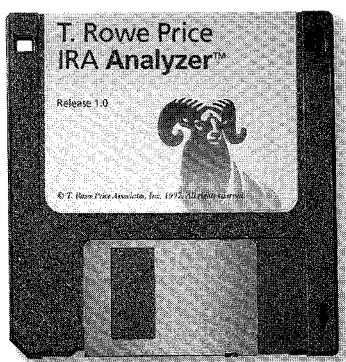
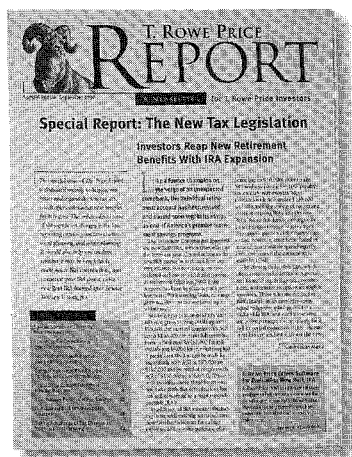
The heart of Gephardt's claim is that the American policy elite has a mistakenly rosy view of today's economic circumstances, and therefore too rosy a view of the strategies that produced today's "success." The drive to balance the federal budget has been a central part of 1990s economic policy, for Republicans and Democrats alike. Gephardt says this drive has gone too far. His tolerance for larger deficits is the most startling part of his argument that what "everyone knows" about today's economy may not be true.

Since the early months of the Clinton Administration the most publicized economic indicators have all moved the right way. Unemployment and the federal budget deficit have both kept going down. Inflation has stayed low. Until the market reverses of late summer, the Dow Jones average had continued its amazing several-year surge. As long as the stock market was soaring, most national politicians were willing to declare the prevailing economic policies successful, and a consensus among academic experts backed them up. It seemed that this was an era of remarkable good fortune in economic policy, and that whatever made it happen should be preserved.

Behind this mood of contentment lies an amazing, and recent, shift in the party politics of economic strategy. In August, Bill Clinton celebrated—as did Trent Lott and Newt Gingrich, the Republican leaders of the Senate and the House—the passage of budget-balancing and tax-cutting bills. (Gephardt, the senior Democrat in the House, voted against the bills.) The air of shared achievement was more than cosmetic, despite Clinton's later line-item vetoes on the tax bill. In all fundamental ways Clinton's Democratic Administration has come to share mainstream Republican beliefs about how best to manage the economy. Clinton's "tri-

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angulations” and “moves to the center” to take popular issues away from the Republicans have been widely noted on social issues like welfare reform and affirmative action. His shift on economic policy is more dramatic and profound.

WHEN running for President in 1992 Clinton said, in effect, that although free markets produce the best results for buyers and sellers, at times they can serve the larger national interest badly. Wall Street might well make its traders rich but fail to direct enough money toward the long-term basic research from which future riches would spring. Private investors might well neglect public infrastructure, from school systems to roads. A privatized medical system might inflate total spending for care while leaving many people with no coverage except in the emergency room. Therefore, Clinton said in his manifesto, *Putting People First*, and in countless speeches and interviews, the national government had a crucial if limited role to play. That role was to referee competition and encourage investment in public infrastructure in the hope that such measures would equip everyone to compete and the nation to prosper more fully than with straight laissez-faire.

Five years after his election Clinton is

that inflation will be controlled, which in turn means

- holding down interest rates, which helps to buoy the stock market, and meanwhile
- pushing a more or less open trade policy, designed to help U.S. exporters and hold down domestic prices in the face of competition from overseas.

This strategy is not supply-side Republicanism, with its emphasis on tax cuts above all else. But it differs from mainstream Republican policy only in degree. The most telling indication of Clinton's conversion to Republicanism is not his interest in cutting the deficit—Democrats have complained about “Reagan deficits” for fifteen years—but the way in which he agreed to cut it. From the late 1970s through the early 1990s federal spending grew from about 20 percent to about 22 percent of the national economy. Most of this increase was for fixed expenses, mainly retirement and medical programs. One way to reduce the deficit would be to “balance up,” or bring revenues up to 22 percent (from around 19 percent in the Reagan years). But the President has agreed with the Republicans to “balance down,” through a deal that will, if its assumptions hold, lower federal spending to about 19 percent in 2002. As Matthew Miller, of *U.S. News & World Report*, has pointed out, “balancing down” to 19 percent is a profound and underappreciated victory for conservatives. If the President had persuaded Congress to reach balance at, say, 21 percent, the extra two points could have meant an additional \$200 billion in federal revenues each year. Conservatives are glad to deny the government this much money; the Clinton of 1992 would have contended that it could be used for education and infrastructure.

If the results are judged by the Dow Jones average and the unemployment index over the past four years, the Administration's essentially Republican strategy has worked brilliantly. As judged by Al Gore, it is bound to keep on working, because Gore has no choice but to run on the Administration's record—which he hopes will continue to be seen as a success. His Republican opponents, whoever they may be, already know how to deal with this record. They will wait for something to go wrong, as it probably will, at which point they can say, “Aha! We don't need four more years of this

failed economic approach.” And if, on the other hand, the stock market doesn't crash and inflation doesn't come back, then the Republicans can say, “Aha! The Democrats have given you a weak and watered-down version of the good ideas they copied from us. Why not get the real thing from the original source?”

The challenge within the Democratic Party will be more complicated. It might not become a personal challenge to Gore as nominee. Like George Bush in 1988 and Walter Mondale in 1984, Gore may (barring legal problems) succeed in creating such an air of inevitability within his party that no rival can raise enough money to run. The problem for Gore would come in the general election, when without Clinton's personal flair he would have to run on “balancing down,” viewing Alan Greenspan as a savior, and other concepts that may fail to energize his party.

AT just this moment, when Democratic and Republican politicians have joined with mainstream economists and journalists in declaring today's laissez-faire approach a total success, an unusual swirl of critical ideas is gathering around the dominant concepts. Some of these criticisms are familiar in the American press—most notably, that while the economy as a whole is growing, it is also becoming more unequal, so many Americans are losing ground. Other elements of the criticisms are heard mainly outside the United States. For instance, in Southeast Asia, economies like Thailand's and Malaysia's have boomed for the past decade through exposure to trade. This year those economies learned that this also meant exposure to currency speculation: when international exchanges sent the value of the Thai baht and the Malaysian ringgit plunging, leaders in those countries complained bitterly about traders at computers in New York or London who could destabilize lives on the other side of the world. Why do countryside vistas in France, England, and Ireland look different from those in America, with more farms and village houses, and fewer billboards and strip malls? Because landowners in Europe are saddled with “inefficient” controls on development. Opportunities for world investment, and the modernization of the European Union,

(Continued on page 42)

Gephardt argues that our “boom” with slow growth has aggravated America's worst problems.

obviously taking a different approach. The collapse of his national health-care proposal, in the summer of 1994, followed by the Republican sweep in congressional elections that fall, accelerated the movement he had already begun away from the idea of activist government. For the past three years the Clinton strategy for growth has boiled down to

- steadily reducing the budget deficit, which in turn means
- reassuring the Federal Reserve Board

NOVEMBER
1997

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

PREVIEW

FILM

Suburban
Characters

CLASSICAL

India's
Sitar
Masters

POPULAR MUSIC

Hypnotic
Strains
à la Beck

JAZZ

Mingus at
His Best

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Film

BY ELLA TAYLOR

LEVITTOWN: THE SOUL OF SUBURBIA

Does urban planning make the man? Not according to *Wonderland*, John O'Hagan's nimble documentary update on the people of Levittown, New York, the world's first assembly-line suburb. By rights the inhabitants of this much-studied housing project, built in 1947 by gung-ho developer William Levitt for Army veterans returning to America's post-Second World War housing shortage, ought to be as conformist as their cookie-cutter homes and gardens. Far from it: not only has the town produced a respectable crop of stars, including rock singer Eddie Money and cartoonist Bill Griffith, whose character Zippy the Pinhead was inspired by a Levittown childhood, but its ordinary folks are as colorful a bunch of kooks as you'd find in any boho urban enclave. From the beauty queen showing off her biceps poolside, to the bird enthusiast whose pets appear to live in his hair, to the aging couples reminiscing about swinger parties they never attended and poltergeists they

never met, the townspeople show a fabulously imaginative gift for spicing up their featureless environment. "It was like *The Lucy Show*, without the accents and without the humor," says one bitter for-



(clockwise from top) Director John O'Hagan, Bill Griffith and Zippy, and Miss New York 1996

mer Levittowner, now a stand-up comedian. O'Hagan, himself a child of the 'burbs, finds both humor and dignity in Levittown without glossing over its dark side, and in so doing runs with graceful intelligence against the grain of cinema's long-standing contempt for suburbia.

VICTORIAN MORALITY AND SUBTERFUGE

Like Jane Campion (*Portrait of a Lady*), Agnieszka Holland (*Europa, Europa*) takes gleeful license with Henry James. Taking license is the filmmaker's job, and though her rendition of *Washington Square* (previously adapted in William Wyler's 1949 film *The Heiress*) opts for broad comedy where James would have raised half an eyebrow, Holland also keeps faith with the author's quietly passionate spirit. Mastering a perennial tendency to over-agitate her acting, Jennifer Jason Leigh gives a modulated performance as Catherine Sloper, the homely, motherless, unloved daughter of a rich physician (Albert Finney, appropriately stiff-necked) who wants to prevent her marriage to the handsome young Morris Townsend



Ben Chaplin and Jennifer Jason Leigh

(played by doe-eyed British actor Ben Chaplin), a possible fortune hunter. Despite the backroom efforts of Catherine's excitable and devious aunt, zestfully enunciated by Maggie ("I have the most fortuitous headache") Smith, to glue the young couple together, the unbending doctor trades on his daughter's lifelong craving to win his love, forcing Catherine into a choice that backfires in a way that surprises only her. True to James's idiosyncratic vision of the heroic, Catherine, too, learns some unexpected lessons from her suffering. Holland and screenwriter Carol Doyle sustain the ambiguity of all their characters' motives with such agility that only at the end of *Washington Square* does it become clear who is too good for whom.

THE BIGGER CHILL

The landscape is Cheeverish, the sex life Updikean with a dash of Woodstock, and the air rank with hypocrisy, public and private. While Nixon fills television screens with increasingly shrill efforts to explain away Watergate, unhappy Connecticut narcissists paper over their loveless marriages with wife-swapping and hippie how-to manuals. Were it not for the puckish sensibility of Ang Lee (*The Wedding Banquet*, *Sense and Sensibility*), who understands better than most the desperate comedy of the modern family struggling to hold the line without faith or community, this would be drearily familiar stuff. Adapted by writer-producer James Schamus from a 1994 novel by Rick Moody, *The Ice Storm* is full of lost souls traveling parallel tracks that never converge. Armed only with vaguely good intentions and Summer of Love patter, Ben and Elena Hood (Kevin Kline and Joan Allen) hang on to their



Fooling around in the Nixon Era

empty marriage by a thread as Elena shoplifts and Ben carries on a desultory affair with a married neighbor, Janey Carver (Sigourney Weaver), who in turn feels neglected by her workaholic husband (Jamey Sheridan). The two couples make equally clueless parents, offering sporadic and inept advice to their spaced-out children (wonderfully played by Christina Ricci, Tobey Maguire, Elijah Wood, and Adam Hann-Bird), who mimic their elders' sexual adventures in bizarre, precocious excursions of their own. Shot with eerie beauty and photo-realist intensity by Frederick Elmes (*Wild at Heart*), *The Ice Storm* is a marvel of tonal balance, its moods shading between absurdism and wistful sadness as the movie builds toward the event that will shatter the two families out of their self-absorbed trance.

Ella Taylor is a film critic for LA Weekly.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SHAWN HONEA, JOHN O'HAGAN, JOHN O'HAGAN

RON BATZDORFF

BARRY WETCHER

Classical Music

BY AUSTIN BAER

FALLEN SOLDIERS

Of all the concert settings of the mass for the dead, none combines the grim pomp of public ceremony with the pain of private mourning as does Benjamin Britten's passionately pacifist *War Requiem* (1961). To drive home his point the composer hit on an idea so neat that in less skilled hands it might have seemed a gimmick. Instead of taking as it stood the familiar Latin text that served the likes of Mozart and Verdi, Britten interwove the Latin with plain-spoken, quietly tragic poems by Wilfred Owen, himself a casualty of what the British still call the Great War. The liturgical passages deploy the full artillery of the modern symphony orchestra and get the grand choral treatment, punctuated by the impersonal clarion exclamations of a solo soprano. Owen's poems, accompanied in chamber style, are divided between two soloists, a tenor and a baritone: voices of the dead. Through these Britten speaks his heart. "I am the enemy you killed, my friend," sings the baritone, leading into the final elegy, most eloquent where the music is most still. Underscoring his own intense personal involvement in the subject matter, Britten dedicated the *War Requiem* "in loving memory" to four who fell in the Second World War, citing each by name and rank. The work's power is not lost in a land at peace, and in recent seasons it has been making the rounds of American orchestras. From November 3 to 10 Britten's compatriot James Judd, the music director of the Florida Philharmonic, leads performances in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach (930-1812 tri-county, or 800-226-1812).

Music
director
James
Judd



WHILE MY SITAR GENTLY WEEPS



Ustad Vilayat Khan

Western musicians of many stripes, who in turn have tried to weave Indian strands into tapestries of their own. The eminent violinist Yehudi Menuhin was instrumental in turning Western listeners on to the art of Ravi Shankar on the sitar; the two even shared the stage in some inventive cross-cultural jam sessions. The Beatles, back from the enlightening East, poured Indian timbres over their next album like so much patchouli. The French visionary Olivier Messiaen made the complexities of Hindu metrics an integral element of

Subtle yet ecstatic, governed by laws and traditions nothing like our own, the classical music of India is virgin territory to most of us in the West. Yet the strains of the subcontinent have cast their spell on professional

his own idiosyncratic musical grammar. In September, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence, the traveling "Music Festival of India" brought to Carnegie Hall a dizzying assembly of India's supreme practitioners. Instrumental luminaries were joined by counterparts in song and dance; for a Western analogy, picture Cecilia Bartoli, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Van Cliburn, Plácido Domingo, James Galway, Evelyn Glennie, Itzhak Perlman, Mstislav Rostropovich, and a few friends sharing a single bill. Is there an irony here? Indian classical music was originally an art of the court, directed exclusively to aristocratic connoisseurs immersed in its intricacies. Today those courts are gone, the gilded cage is sprung, and the birds fly forth, though not often our way, and never before in so rich a flock. This month the festival continues at the Paramount Theater in Seattle (November 1; 206-292-ARTS) and the Nob Hill Masonic Center, in San Francisco (November 7; 415-392-4400). These concerts focus on three top stars from the gala: Ustad Vilayat Khan and his son Shujaat Khan, sixth and seventh generations in an unbroken line of sitar masters, and Shankar's colleague Zakir Hussain on tabla, the intoxicating Indian drum.

IRA LANDGARTEN

AN APPLE KEEPS THE TYRANT AT BAY

Everyone knows the last three minutes of the *William Tell* overture, which leaves roughly three hours and fifty-seven minutes of gorgeous music to discover (including the overture's opening nine). This month the San Francisco Opera offers a rare opportunity to do so (November 2-24; 415-864-3330). Adapted from Schiller's high-minded costume drama, and written for the Paris Opera under an extraordinary contract with the French government, Rossini's final opera centers, of course, on the legendary thirteenth-century Swiss freedom fighter who was handy with his cross-bow. The climax comes right on schedule when Tell, having refused to kneel to an Austrian tyrant's empty hat, must shoot an apple off his own son's head—not, however, before delivering an aria of miraculously poised solemnity that amazed the great

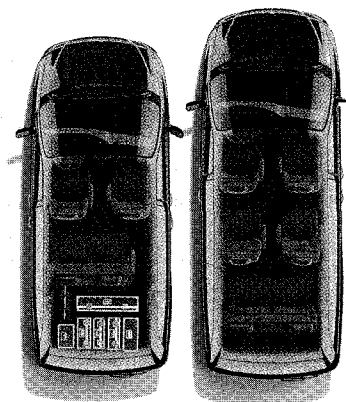


Richard Wagner himself. But individuals are less important in this opera than the grandeur of nature and the fate of a people oppressed: *Guillaume Tell*, to use the proper French title, has a sweep and pathos that place it at the very pinnacle of Romantic operas. Eugène Delacroix—another Rossini fan—would have been just the painter to capture its scenes of storm-tossed lake, somber forest, and night-shrouded wilderness.

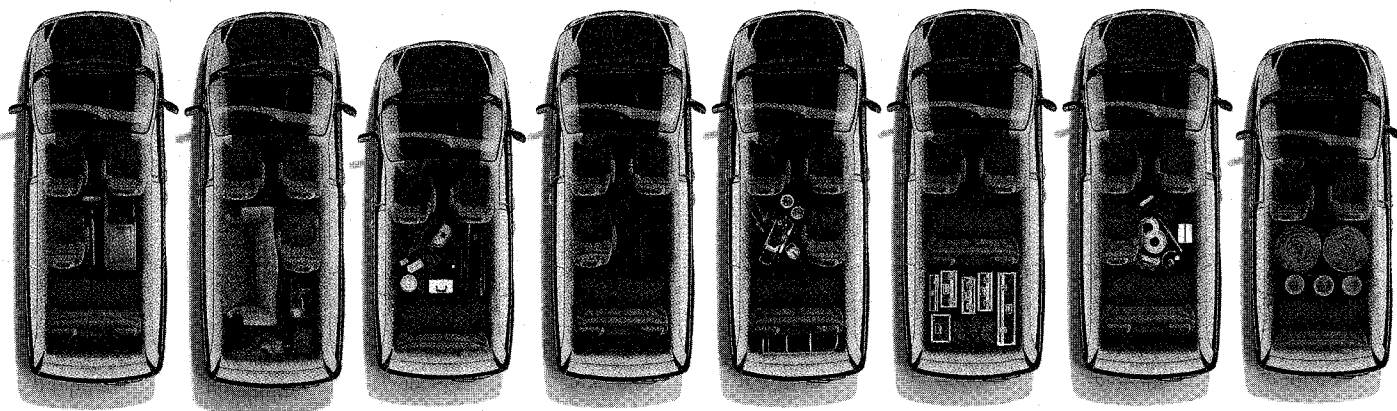
Austin Baer is a writer based in New York.

MARTY SOHL

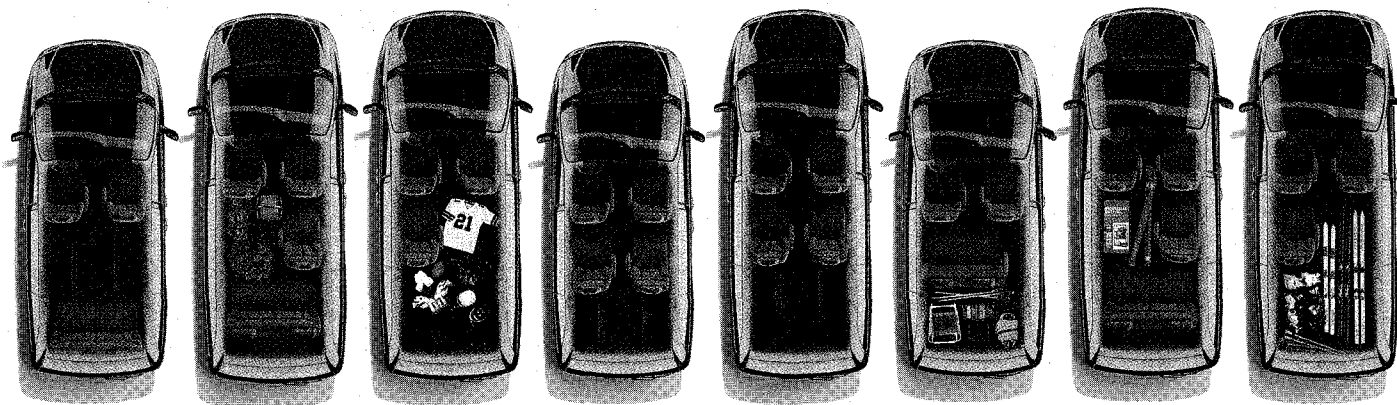
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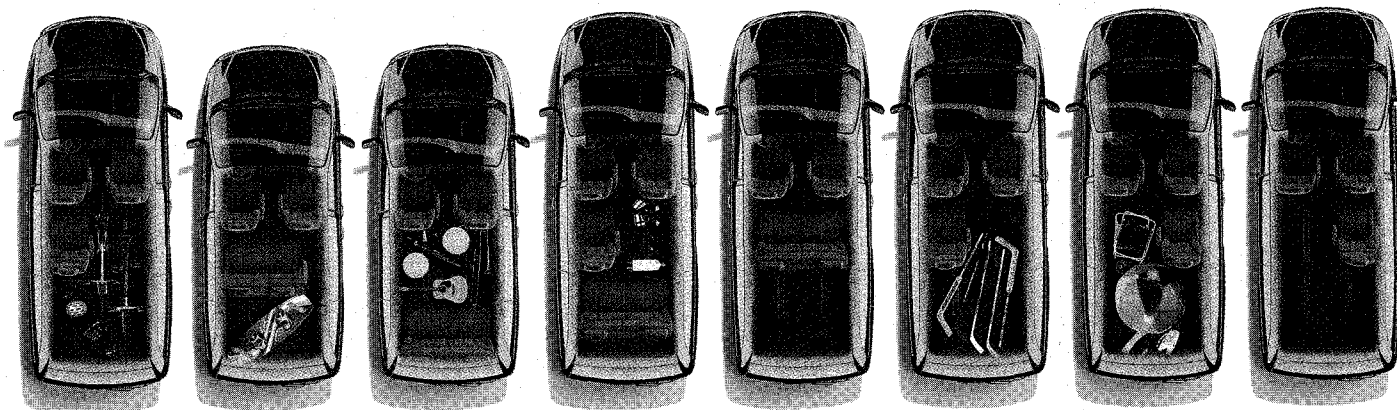
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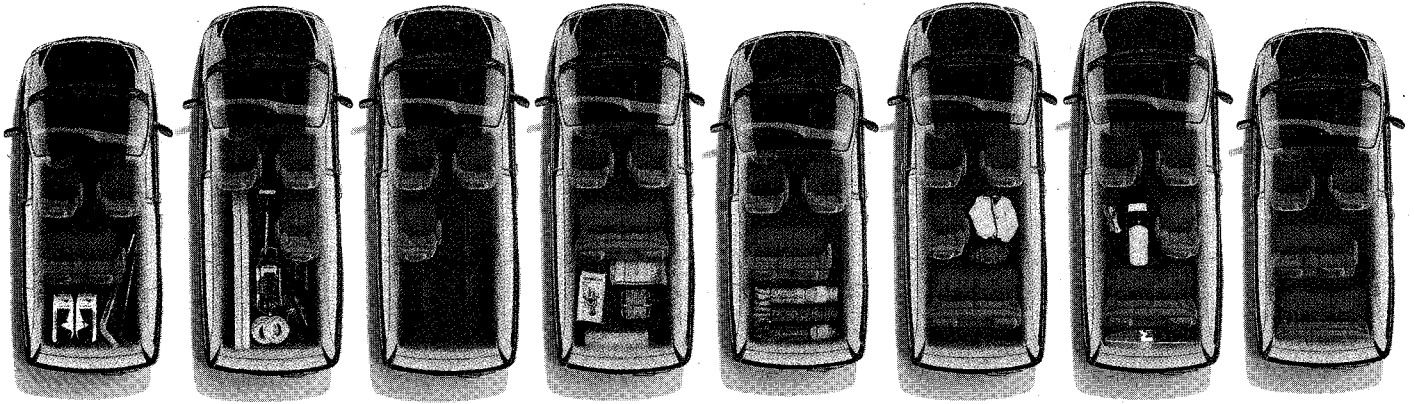
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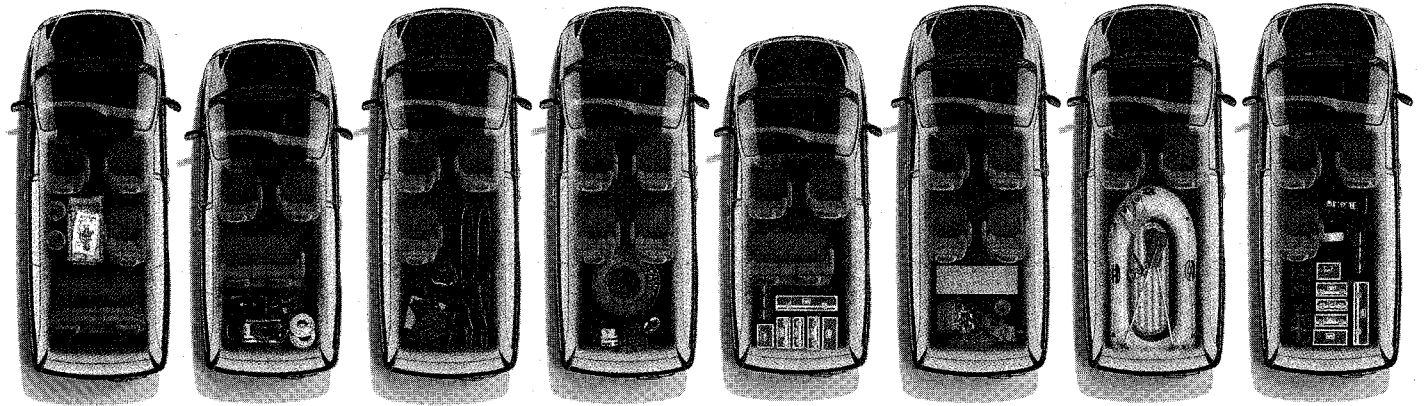
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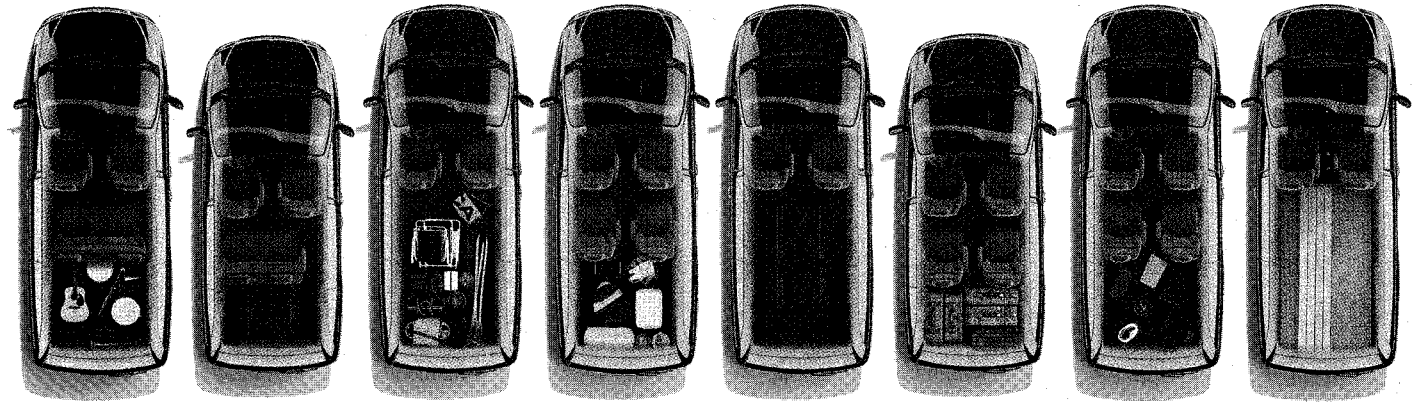
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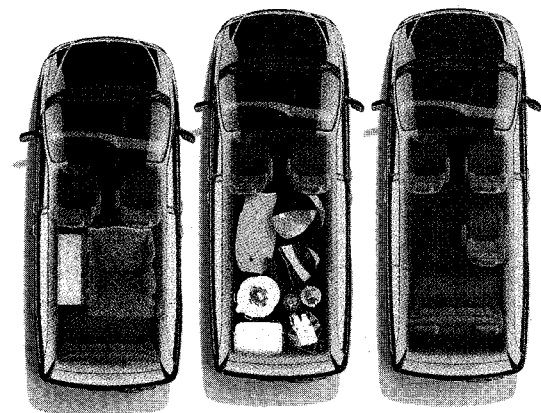
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Popular Music and Jazz

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

A SHOWCASE FOR THE STYLIST

The pianist Kenny Barron has been a jazz presence since he joined Dizzy Gillespie as a teenager thirty-five years ago, and is one of the decade's dominant stylists. Yet even with growing critical recognition, Barron's mixture of flexibility, consistency, and taste is too often taken for granted. *Things Unseen* (Verve) presents an opportunity to give Barron his due, since this gathering of his quintet and guests, which features eight original songs, highlights his many strengths.

Tracks featuring the quintet, now in its second decade, encapsulate Barron's musical personality. At the keyboard his touch and voicings are strong but not heavy, rich yet open, and his compositions are conceived in the same spirit. "Marie Laveau" sustains a swampy mystery for thirteen minutes without going slack; "Tongue in Cheek" juggles a witty conjunction of allusions to Thelonius Monk. The collective pacing is im-



Kenny Barron

peccable, thanks to the trumpeter Eddie Henderson, the tenor saxophonist John Stubblefield, the bassist David Williams, and the drummer Victor Lewis, longtime associates who share Barron's knack for putting the right notes in the right places.

Three guest stars enhance *Things Unseen* with far more than cameo appearances. The percussionist Mino Cinelu provides lessons in meshing with Lewis, and functions as the sole rhythmic anchor on the shuffle blues "Christopher's Dance." Naoko Terai is a violinist Barron heard in a Japanese nightclub, and her melodic focus is

especially impressive on the improvised duet "Rose Noire." The guitarist John Scofield, nearly a decade younger than Barron but possessed of a similar versatility and unflagging inspiration, completes the package with typically off-center spice, adding one more reason why *Things Unseen* should not go unheard.—B.B.

PSYCHEDELIC MUSINGS AND HIP-HOP BEATS

At a time when the music business is experiencing a crisis both in sales and in meaning, with critics and artists alike complaining of creative doldrums, Forest For the Trees arrives with an astonishing self-titled album (Dreamworks) of undulating hip-hop beats and the best latter-day psychedelia this side of the Butthole Surfers. Since "electronica" has become the classification of the day, FFTT will probably be lumped with the Chemical Brothers and Prodigy, but it is decidedly different in mood. Like the original psychedelia from the Summer of Love, FFTT goes for whimsy and issues a friendly invitation to subvert your own mind. In other words, it's psychedelia as if the violent hostility of punk had never happened. So when you put on your headphones and your brain dissolves in the hypnotic and oddly melodic swirls of sound from a vast array of bizarre sources, you won't be contem-



plating suicide. You'll be laughing.

Mostly the work of Carl Stephenson, who co-wrote the hugely catchy "Loser" with Beck and co-produced his debut album,

Mellow Gold, FFTT makes Beck seem like a traditionalist. A classically trained violinist who also plays guitar, sitar, drums, didgeridoo, and all manner of synthesizer weirdness, Stephenson wrote most of *Forest For the Trees* five years ago and completed it three years ago. He then needed

hospitalization for mental problems. This will doubtless create a legend, but the proof here is in the utterly liberating music, not in speculation about creativity and insanity. Three years late, it's still ahead of all the currently charted competition.

—C.M.Y.

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe.

Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, and other publications.

ESSENTIAL MINGUS

No label could present a more complete picture of the bassist and composer Charles Mingus's achievements than Rhino's exceptional six-disc anthology *Passions of a Man: The Complete Atlantic Recordings (1956-1961)*. *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (1956) and *The Clown* (1957) capture the first flowering of Mingus's approach. His use of scales rather than chord changes, spontaneously cued modulations, tempo variations, noise elements, and improvised spoken narrative were radical departures that produced music of unprecedented range and emotion, and his performance of "Haitian Fight Song" redefined jazz-bass virtuosity. Two invaluable collaborators, the trombonist Jimmy Knepper and the drummer Dannie Richmond, make material from *The Clown* particularly enlightening. The albums *Blues & Roots* (1959) and *Oh Yeah* (1961) find Mingus



belatedly articulating his ties to jazz's gospel foundations in a churning stew of ecstatic and often caustic voices. Booker Ervin and Roland Kirk add scorching sax work; Mingus plays piano and sings on *Oh Yeah*. The set also includes a 1960

Antibes Jazz Festival performance and a 75-minute interview wherein Mingus verbalized the principles that his music so eloquently articulates.

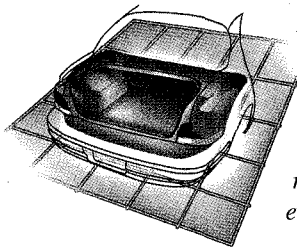
—B.B.



The New Dodge

Lifetime's "Intimate Portrait" series examines the lives of prominent women through interviews, film and television clips, and personal accounts. This month tune in to episodes on the lives of the actresses Audrey Hepburn (November 21 at 7:00 P.M.) and Anjelica Huston (November 23 at 10:00 P.M.). The New Dodge is the proud sponsor of acclaimed programming on cable television and of this month's Arts & Entertainment Preview.

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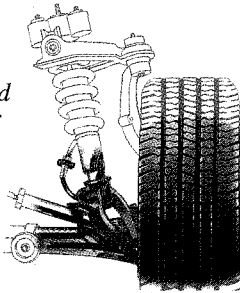
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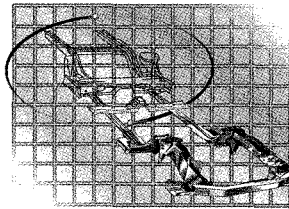
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(Continued from page 34)

are putting pressure on these antique rules, but the role of the state may not be in the decline it appears to be.

Four years ago a World Bank report caused titters throughout Asia because of its conclusion that the “miracle economies” of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan showed the power of private enterprise unencumbered by the state. Maybe the governments *had* been involved in these

The claim that government deserves to spend more money is the most significant novelty in recent politics.

economic miracles, the report conceded, but the countries would have done even better if bureaucrats had kept their hands off. Last June a new, “Oh, never mind” report from the bank essentially recanted the original one. Effective state intervention, the World Bank now said, was the “cornerstone of successful economies”; without it “economic and social development is impossible.” What unites these developments, and recent electoral victories by the left in France and Mexico, is the sense that global capitalism is getting too big for its britches. It should be a tool for increasing wealth, the new thinking runs—not the final determinant of how a society develops.

As the Dow Jones average kept moving up, America took little interest in this debate. But it has grown vociferous enough elsewhere that it will probably soon be heard in some form here. And the person responsible is likely to be . . . Dick Gephardt, the mildest-mannered and most deferential of today’s major political figures. To judge from his recent speeches, and two long interviews I conducted with him this summer, he is ready to make a frontal case.

GEPHARDT is similar to Bill Clinton in one way and different in most others. The similarity is in the way he listens. Many politicians are visibly miffed when

they have to sit still while someone else is the center of attention. At best they remain engaged only long enough to figure out which of the many prepared-answer tapes their brains should start playing as soon as the other person has finished speaking. Gephardt, like Clinton, uses eye contact and a range of facial expressions to suggest that he really is listening—that his attention and time, a politician’s scarcest commodities, are completely yours while you speak. Richard Ben Cramer devoted several paragraphs to this phenomenon in *What It Takes*. For example:

When Gephardt started to listen, his whole person went into “receive” mode. He locked his sky-blue eyes on your face, and they didn’t wiggle around between your eyes and your mouth and the guy who walked in the door behind you: they were just on you, still and absorptive, like a couple of small blotters. . . . If it was just you and your problem, he’d stay on “receive” until . . . you were *weak* from being listened to.

As for the differences: Clinton, ruddy and big-featured, fills a room; Gephardt is trim and undercolored, with famously pale hair and eyebrows. Clinton has a rhetorically powerful voice range, effective either preaching at a black church or talking ironically with editorial writers. Gephardt seems unable to shift registers when moving from public to private discourse. Both ways he is well-mannered and sincere. Clinton was an early favorite of the policy-writer crowd, because he has a gift for spinning out ideas and imagining all their complications—a big help to writers. Gephardt is a man of committee work and of Congress; when he’s presented with a big theme, his first instinct is to think of what bills he could introduce.

Interviewing Gephardt can therefore be frustrating, to put it mildly. He doesn’t think or talk the way writers like. When I asked during our second interview the softest of questions—How would he sum up his economic message in a sentence or two?—he said, “I haven’t thought about the exact right words to say it. Let me just throw out different words.” (Which he then did: “Higher growth, or strong growth, getting the pie to grow again. . . . Building from the bottom up is a big part of it. ‘Moral capitalism’ might be a way to say it, where you are

sustaining higher productivity and higher wealth creation by treating people fairly.”) When thrown another easy pitch—a request to say exactly what he would do if he were put in charge of economic policy—he responded with another rambling list, of mainly small-scale initiatives. (First on the list was “Reward for Results,” a program that gives extra school aid to the schools whose students meet performance standards.)

“There is no such thing as ‘broad philosophy’ at the legislative level,” Barry Bluestone, an economist at the Boston branch of the University of Massachusetts, has said in explaining Gephardt’s listlike style of speech and thought. “The only way to put together a broad philosophy if you’re in Congress is through a series of specific bills.” Bluestone worked as a staff adviser to Gephardt for six months, and is one of several economists and writers Gephardt consults in developing economic plans. Others are James K. Galbraith, of the University of Texas at Austin; Larry Chimerine, of the Economic Strategy Institute; Jeff Madrick, the author of *The End of Affluence*; and Jeff Faux, of the Economic Policy Institute. Gephardt has also followed the writings of Robert Kuttner, the author of *Everything for Sale*, and William Greider, the author of *One World, Ready or Not*. Most of those he consults claim, as Bluestone puts it, that the long lists of career legislator’s specifics do indeed “fit together into a broader view of governing and leadership”—and that this view should make Dick Gephardt, rather than Mario Cuomo or Paul Wellstone or any Kennedy or anyone else, the main vehicle for a reaction against the current economic consensus.

THE view begins with the deceptively trite-sounding premise that the U.S. economy, despite its recent boom, has been growing far too slowly. Most economists would agree on the “slowly”: during the economic recovery of the past four years the U.S. growth rate has averaged about 2.3 percent a year, as compared with an average of about 3.5 percent during recoveries in the first two thirds of this century. The disagreement is over whether this growth is *too* slow—and whether anything can be done if it is.

The prevailing view holds that the economy has kept on growing precisely

because the growth has been so slow. Anything faster would bring back inflation, which would ruin the stock market and everything else. Alan Blinder, an economist at Princeton University, explained the reasoning behind this view in a recent issue of *The American Prospect* magazine. Gephardt and his camp contend that fear of inflation is out-of-date. Instead, they say, the extremely flexible structure of the new economy, in which people bounce from job to job and computers may finally be increasing productivity, should make it possible to increase output, jobs, and pay much faster than before without hitting inflationary limits. The seemingly tiny difference of a point or two on the target for a U.S. growth rate has enormous political and social consequences. Gephardt argues that the contemporary "boom" with slow growth has aggravated America's worst problems, from social inequality to underinvestment in schools and roads. He told me, "I buy the theory that for a hundred years we grew at an average of three and a half percent a year, and for the past twenty or twenty-five years we've grown

at two and a half. I think what [these] years have shown is that when the pie grows less rapidly, the people at the top have greater political influence and are able to claim a larger and larger share of the pie. The people at the top, being affected like everybody by a pie that's not growing as fast, have worked very hard to hold on to their share or enhance it. And so the very act of getting the pie to grow again at three or three and a half to me is critically important."

Blaming slow growth for inequality is a convenient rather than a completely convincing position for Gephardt. It is convenient because until the growth rate actually does pick up, there is no way to disprove his claim that if it did, it would offset today's poor-get-poorer trend. It is unconvincing because so much evidence suggests that most economies around the world are becoming less equal by the year, and few or none are growing fast enough to reduce inequality. Still, this is where Gephardt will make his stand, and it raises the question of how, exactly, he would propose to make the pie grow. Apart from a variety of specific pallia-

tives—such as a "best practices" initiative, in which the federal government would follow the Australian model of publicizing industrial success stories—his answer lies with the federal budget. Far from spending too much money, Gephardt claims, the national government might well be spending too little. Gephardt is the only prominent politician to claim that the recent achievement of "balancing the budget down" so as to achieve a zero deficit within a few years may make the country poorer rather than richer.

"Remember, *what's the goal?*" he says. "The goal, to me, is growth, high standard of living, high quality of life. And the fiscal-responsibility part [the balanced budget] should be a part of the strategy to serve that goal. And I think you best serve [the real] goal by changing your definition of balance. I like to call it 'rough balance.'"

"Rough balance" will be Gephardt's argument with the Republicans—and with Al Gore and the Clinton legacy as well. He claims that a deficit equal to one percent of the gross domestic product is

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trivial by historical standards, and that a budget with such a deficit should be considered “roughly” balanced. The reason to stop at one percent or half a percent rather than pushing on to zero, he says, is that taking the last bit of money out of the budget (in today’s economy half a percent could mean about \$40 billion) could make it almost impossible to invest in education, research, environmental efforts, or other sources of long-term public wealth. (The money could in theory be taken out of entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare, but Gephardt knows that in reality the investment accounts are easier to cut—which is generally what has happened.) A few weeks before Bill Clinton signed the balanced-budget bill, Gephardt said, “We’ve got to get off this idea that [balance] has to be exactly mathematically calibrated each and every year or we’re all going to turn into pumpkins. We’ve got to get people to understand that if you’re below one percent of [GDP], that’s good enough, thank you. We don’t have to keep turning the wheels here until we destroy everything.” Because during the Reagan years there seemed to be no end to deficits, he said, the public swung to the belief that cutting the deficit was more important than any other conceivable goal. His case would be that “we

equal income distribution are more important than the accounting abstractions of balancing the budget.”

WHETHER Gephardt challenges Gore in the primaries or merely challenges Gore’s ideas from Congress, his claim that the government deserves to keep and spend more money is the most significant novelty in recent politics. Gephardt has already challenged the Clinton Administration on its tax and welfare policies. He voted against the recent round of tax cuts because, he claimed, more than half their benefits would go to the top 10 percent of taxpayers. He bitterly opposed Clinton’s welfare-reform bill. In his interviews with me he departed from Administration beliefs on a variety of other issues, including normalized trade with China (“All the arguments for [trading normally with] China [are] reminiscent of the arguments people made against sanctions against South Africa ten years ago”) and the benefits of having extended the North American Free Trade Agreement to Mexico (he claims that the boom in U.S. exports to Mexico is illusory, since most are components shipped back to the United States after processing).

Gephardt’s one big brush with national controversy came with his strong anti-trade-deficit push in the 1988 campaign. Wearing a nylon union-member windbreaker and foreshadowing Pat Buchanan’s protectionist arguments of 1992 and 1996, Gephardt argued that foreign exports were destroying American jobs. He remains skeptical of the mainstream claim that any expansion of trade, under any circumstances, is automatically beneficial for all parties. “I think the terms on which trade takes place are extremely important,” he said. The proper terms of trade, in his view, include pressure on China and Mexico for workers’ rights and political liberalization. His trade argument is connected to his deficit view, since both involve the claim that a steering role for government can produce a better outcome than pure laissez-faire. His trade position is more familiar—and less acceptable—in mainstream discourse than his deficit claims, and it may be the factor that disqualifies him from a hearing on economic policy in general.

Gephardt seemed at different moments to shrink from and to welcome the pro-

government implications of his message. He mocked what he said would be the standard Republican response: “They’ll say, ‘Just get rid of the government and cut taxes and everything will be fine.’ I mean, we [Democrats] began this argument in ’96 over the role of government, and our message was simple. We said we don’t think there ought to be deep, damaging cuts in Medicare and education and the environment to pay for a tax cut for the wealthy. And I think we won that argument. Dick Armey would say that people don’t want Medicare, they don’t want public education—they really want home schooling or whatever. I think we proved that wrong. I mean, I can’t prove that to you, but we won the presidency, we picked up seats in the House.” But Gephardt also hastened to damp down the implication that he was making a stronger pro-government case than Bill Clinton did in 1992: “I don’t think you go out and say, ‘We need more government’ or ‘Government is the answer to all problems.’ I do think you say in very specific terms that the world we’re in requires educated, trained, mentally capable, productive human beings. We have to lead and manage people so that they can be highly productive. I think if you stick with specifics, you don’t need a theoretical discussion of government. What you need to say is, ‘We need to educate these kids. How are we going to do this? We know how to do it. We’ve seen it done. Let’s do it!’”

If he wants to become the public symbol of the activist case, Gephardt will need to work out its mushiness, kinks, and internal contradictions. He might need rhetorical gifts approaching those of Franklin D. Roosevelt to sell a pro-government concept in post-Reagan, post-Clinton America. If he plans to use his ideas in a run for the presidency, he will also need some way to offset Al Gore’s energetic use of incumbency. But American political debate is shaped as often by outspoken losers as by careful winners. Jack Kemp has so far lost every race for national office but greatly advanced the supply-side case; George Wallace and William Jennings Bryan, each in his own way, changed the campaigns and policies of the men who beat them. If Dick Gephardt, a cautious survivor by nature, wants to make a lasting impact, he may need to seem as daring personally as he is becoming in his thinking. ☞

FDR’s gifts might be needed to sell a pro-government concept in post-Reagan, post- Clinton America.

have a greater goal, which is to have a higher standard of living . . . and higher expectations, and saving the environment, and having social peace.” All these goals, he said, would be more easily achieved with faster growth—which in turn would be easier to achieve with another \$80 billion a year in public spending. “Where he diverges from the prevailing view,” James Galbraith says of Gephardt, “is in saying that economic growth and high employment and a more

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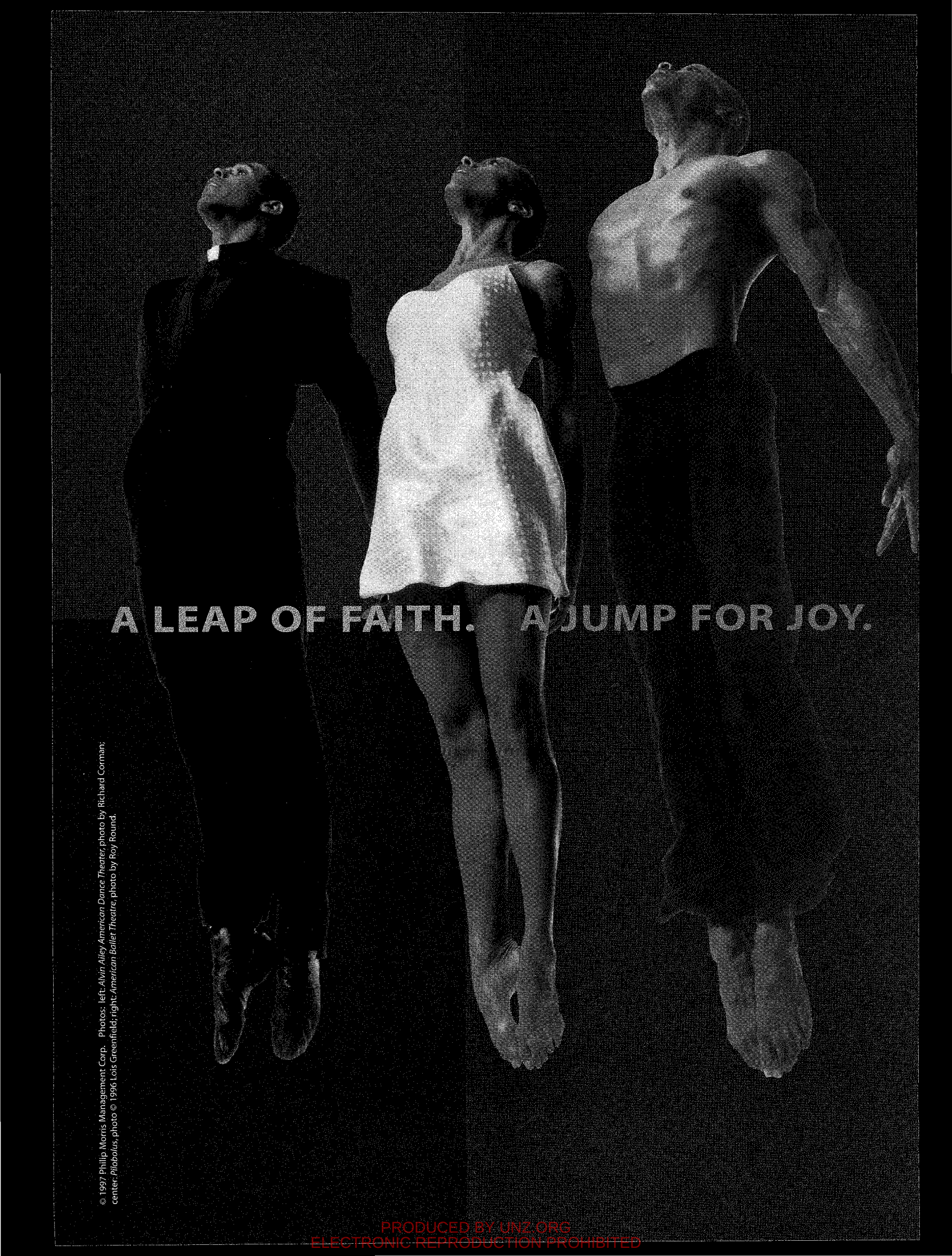
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A LEAP OF FAITH. A JUMP FOR JOY.

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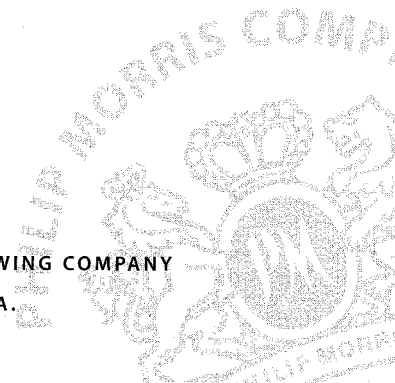
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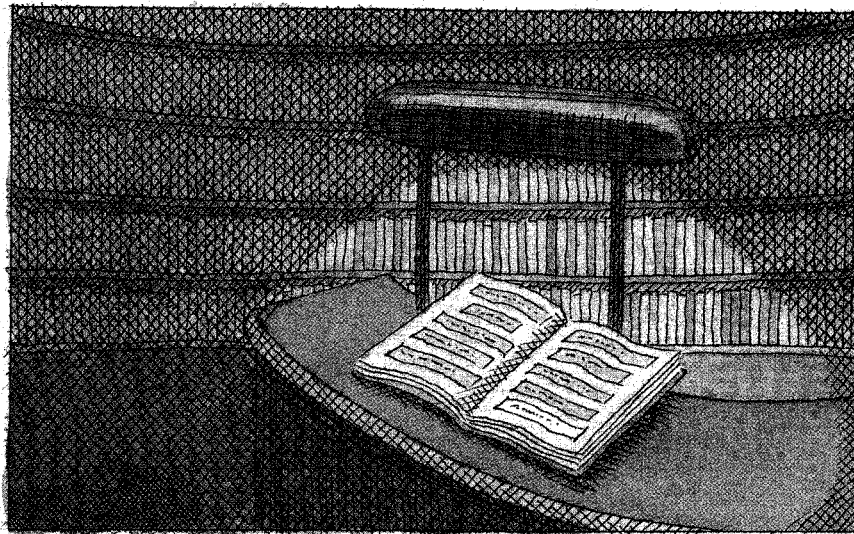
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A Memory of the Nineteen-Nineties

Being a faithful account of the events of the designated day, when the man who had disappeared was expected briefly to return

ONE FORTY-NINE P.M. The gilded clock that looks down on the Round Reading Room at the British Museum has no second hand. But I am watching very closely. I can actually see the minute hand creeping toward the Roman numeral X.

Above, the vast blue plaster dome with its arched windows and skylight is just as it was a hundred years ago, on that terrible day when—

A distant loose-leaf binder clicks shut.

It's 1:53. Soon it will be two o'clock. Then, at last, 2:10, the moment I have been waiting for. To be here, in this spot in London, on this day at ten past two, I have traveled 4,000 miles and planned for thirty-four and a half years.

Thirty-four and a half years ago I was sitting in a nearly empty high school

classroom in Philadelphia under the spell of my English teacher and drama coach, D. G. Rosenbaum. I idolized

by Teller Mr. Rosenbaum (or "Rosey," as we Drama Society brats called him). He had a dark,

resonant voice. He had a widow's peak and a moustache and goatee that made him look like Mephistopheles; he hinted that his ancestors were Scottish warlocks. He wore trim black suits, blood-red vests, and pince-nez. He smoked black cigarettes with gold tips, and made them vanish by sleight of hand when the principal was nearby. Rosey knew psychoanalysis. He quoted Aristotle, Kenneth Burke, and Ezra Pound in everyday conversation. He ordered his milkshakes spiked with raw eggs.

That afternoon Rosey was entertaining half a dozen aspiring young actors by reading aloud "Enoch Soames: A

Memory of the Eighteen-Nineties," by Max Beerbohm. "Soames" is a sharp sketch of a dull poet Beerbohm encountered in London just before the turn of the century.

He was a stooping, shambling person, rather tall, very pale, with longish and brownish hair. He had a thin vague beard—or rather, he had a chin on which a large number of hairs weakly curled and clustered to cover its retreat. . . . The young writers of that era—and I was sure this man was a writer—strove earnestly to be distinct in aspect. This man had striven unsuccessfully. He wore a soft black hat of clerical kind but of Bohemian intention, and a grey waterproof cape which, perhaps because it was waterproof, failed to be romantic. I decided that "dim" was the *mot juste* for him.

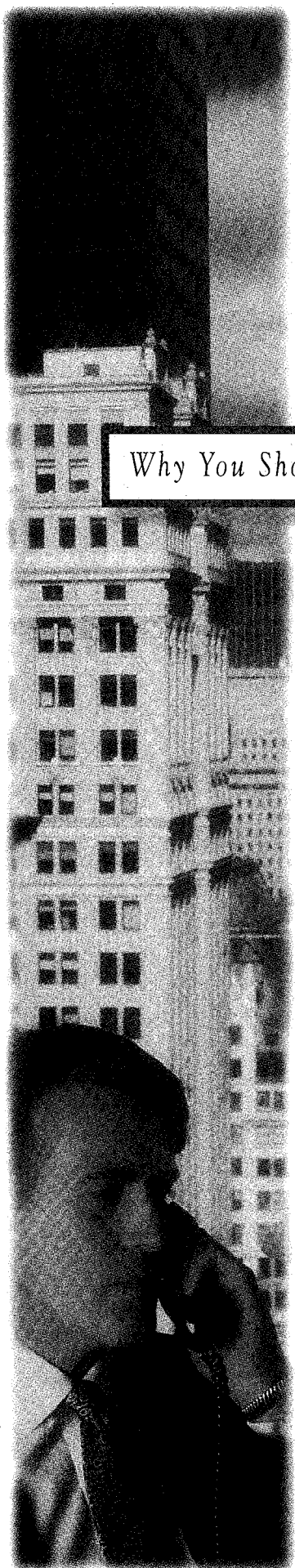
Soames's poems were equally dim. His most successful book sold only three copies. But his vanity was untarnished. Soames was certain that future generations would recognize his genius.

On the afternoon of June 3, 1897, Beerbohm was talking with Soames in a Soho café when a sinister stranger in a scarlet vest interrupted. The stranger introduced himself as the Devil and made an offer. He would transport Soames a hundred years into the future, to visit the Round Reading Room of the British Museum *as it would be in 1997*. Here Soames could consult the library's all-knowing catalogue and at last be sure of his place in literary history. The price for such a trip: eternity in Hell. Soames accepted. At ten past two on June 3, 1897, Enoch Soames vanished into the future.

Later that afternoon Soames reappeared in the little café. He looked grim and immediately got drunk. Beerbohm prodded him to recount his trip. Soames said that his arrival in the Reading Room of 1997 had caused a sensation.

"They stared at *me*, I can tell you. . . . I think I rather scared them. They moved away whenever I came near. They followed me about at a distance, wherever I went. The men at the round desk in the middle seemed to have a sort of panic. . . ."

Soames had gone straight to the catalogue and had taken out the volume he



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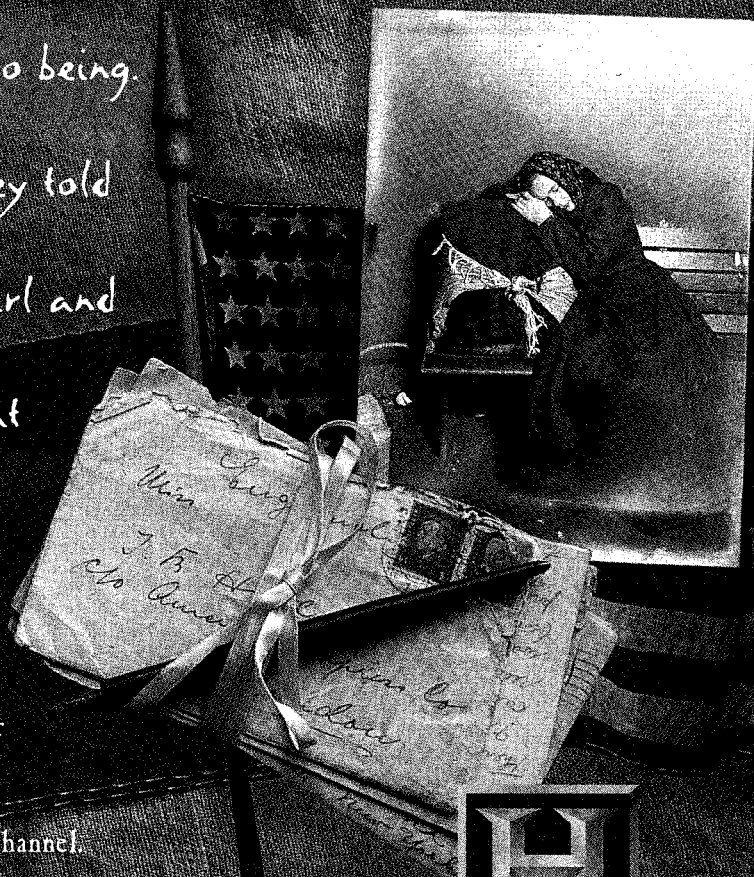
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and you run to the bow of
the ship for a better look.

Everyone does. Your child in one hand, a roped-together suitcase in
the other, you strain to see over the blur of hats and waving arms.
Two weeks of folk songs and boiled potatoes and seasickness are
almost behind you. Like the village, and everyone you've ever known.
Now if only you could see something, anything. And then suddenly
it appears, as if you willed it into being.
The statue of the proud lady they told
you about. You kiss your little girl and
put her on your shoulders so that
she, too, may see the future.

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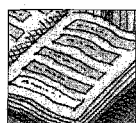


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hoped would contain endless editions, critiques, and annotations of his work. He found none. He searched the library all afternoon, until at last he found one lone mention of his name in a book on English literature of the late nineteenth century.

Enoch Soames, the book said, was an



*On the facing page
a new, white slip
has been stuck on
with tape.*

imaginary character in a story by Max Beerbohm.

Just as Soames finished telling Beerbohm about his visit to 1997, the Rosey-esque stranger reappeared and dragged the poor poet away, presumably to Hell. He was never seen again. But, Beerbohm wrote,

You realise that the reading-room into which Soames was projected by the Devil was in all respects precisely as it will be on the afternoon of June 3, 1997. You realise, therefore, that on that afternoon, when it comes round, there the self-same crowd will be, and there Soames too will be, punctually. . . . The fact that people are going to stare at him, and follow him around, and seem afraid of him, can be explained only on the hypothesis that they will somehow have been prepared for his ghostly visitation. . . .

In other words, anyone in the Round Reading Room of the British Museum at ten past two on June 3, 1997, would be able to verify Beerbohm's memoir, and see an authentic, guaranteed, proven ghost.

When Rosey finished reading us the story, he closed the book, leaned back, and removed his pince-nez. "I wonder," he said, "how many Enoch Soameses will show up."

At the time, I thought he was merely musing. Later I understood. He was giving me a homework assignment.

ONE MINUTE PAST TWO P.M. The Reading Room is laid out like a wheel. The hub is the superintendent's round desk in the middle, ringed by low bookcases containing volumes of the catalogue. The spokes are long desks, upholstered in faded blue leather. At these very desks worked Yeats, Shaw, and Karl Marx. I'm sitting at desk M-1 with a good view of the S section of the catalogue.

As I watch, a silver-haired scholar in a rumpled suit pulls out the mold-green tome labeled SNOOD to SOBOS and opens it on top of the bookcase. As he turns the pages, a plumpish, pale woman with glasses and a pageboy haircut timidly steps up and peeks over his shoulder. Soon they're joined by a dark-haired, stocky man, who asks the others, with a heavy accent, "Please, do you speak Spanish?"

I leave my spot at desk M-1 to see what they're looking at.

The entries are pasted into the catalogue on individual yellowed slips. There are eight Soameses—none christened Enoch—credited with books about fascism, phonetics, Holy Communion, and goat farming. On the facing catalogue page a new, white slip has been stuck on with tape:

Soames, Enoch,
see Beerbohm, Max (3.6.1997).

As I return to my seat, I notice other spectators lounging watchfully in the neighborhood of the catalogue: A slim woman in a pale-green suit. An angular man, about fifty, casually holding a tiny camera. A tall, smirking, aesthetic Teddy boy, with a rainbow-hued vest under his Edwardian jacket and a spray of white snowdrops in his buttonhole.

Standing next to my desk is an attractive woman of about fifty in a raincoat. "Where are you from?" I ask in my library whisper.

"Malibu," she says. Her name is Sally, and she writes mystery novels. Is she here just for this event? "Yes. I've thought about it for thirty-five years. And I just felt I should be here to see if he shows up."

The slim woman in the pale-green suit is standing behind me. I ask her where

she's from. "Cambridge. We're supposed to be very serious at Cambridge. But don't tell anyone: I taped the slip in the catalogue."

Sally from Malibu touches my arm. "I think he's here. Look." She points to a birdlike dandy with pale-pink window-pane-check trousers, a burgundy vest, and a gold watch fob. His beard is neatly trimmed and his moustache is waxed hard enough to slash a pillow to ribbons.

"That *can't* be Soames," I say. "He's not 'dim' at all. Look how healthy his beard is. And he's not wearing the black hat and the waterproof cape." I look at the clock. "Besides," I say, "it's only six after two."

"Oh, you're right," Sally says with a sigh.

TEN PAST TWO P.M. About a dozen pilgrims are waiting, loosely encircling the catalogue bookcase on which the SNOOD volume lies open. The librarians at the round desk in the middle look out at the siege uneasily.

From my right I hear "There he is!"

Not thirty feet from the catalogue a man in a gray Inverness cape and a black clerical hat is making his way toward us.

Someone whispers, "Where did he come from?"

"He's perfect!" gasps the aesthete with the boutonniere.

And, really, he is. The wide-brimmed beaver hat is threadbare. The cape is mud-stained. The man under the cape appears to be in his late twenties, with a large head, long neck, and sloping shoulders. He is pale save for scattered inflammations on his skin, and his mouse-brown hair droops down his neck. To his chin and his upper lip clings thin, lusterless fuzz. His eyes are wide-set, hooded, and sad.

He goes directly to the catalogue and gazes for a long time at the gap where the SNOOD volume belongs. He pulls out the volume to the left and looks through it, puzzled. Then he notices SNOOD lying open on top of the bookcase and leafs through it.

We would be impolite to stare at a living person as we gawk right now at this Enoch Soames. But surely this is not a mere living person. He is either the specter of a nineteenth-century poet on his way to damnation or an actor putting the finishing touches on a great literary magic trick. *Not* to stare would be rude.

The dome echoes with the far-off thud of books mingling with whispers and little bursts of out-of-place laughter: "I want to touch his cape to see if it's waterproof!" "Look: his hand's not even trembling." "My, he's very professional."

"Soames" is undistracted from his mission. He goes to the center desk and inquires. We cannot hear his request, but we all know it. He is asking if there are other catalogues he should look in. The librarian shakes his head, and Soames, bewildered, returns to the SNOOD volume and checks it again. The angular man with the camera leans forward and takes a snapshot. Soames does not flinch.

The crowd parts as he moves away from the catalogue. Whether he be actor or specter, to touch him would be sacrilege.

Sally from Malibu edges in close beside me. "For some reason," she says, "I'm having to fight tears."

TWO THIRTY-ONE P.M. The curious have joined the faithful, and the crowd has doubled.

Soames has just taken out a volume of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and is seated at one of the long desks next to a student who is making notes from some books on Kafka. The student senses a presence and looks up to see an anguished man in 1890s rainwear. The student looks back at his Kafka, and



*A man in a gray
Inverness cape
is making his way
toward us.*

copies out a few words. Then he glances up toward the catalogue. Fifty people are staring at him. He returns to his books. A minute later he looks up again. He is surrounded. The student slams closed his Kafka and stalks away, leaving his stack of notes behind.

Soames rises gloomily and returns his book to the shelf. A bearded librarian approaches him and says something we cannot hear. Soames nods and then glides along the wall. We lose sight of him.

Suddenly someone whispers, "He's gone!"

And he is—there's not a trace of him anywhere.

"I didn't see him leave!"

"He didn't go out the door. I was watching it."

The aesthete with the flower in his lapel leans toward me. "Ha! It's a conjuring trick, isn't it?" he says, grinning.

The bearded librarian addresses the group. "Ladies and gentlemen, if you are visitors, it's time to leave now. There's nothing more to see here; shall we be moving along, then?"

As the spectators file out, an old man in a gray cardigan turns to me. Random stubs of white hair poke out of his face, and a wild gleam flashes in his eye.

"I read it in 1945," he says. "I thought I'd be dead long before 1997, but I fooled myself." He laughs. "I lived!"

FIFTY-FIVE PAST TWO P.M. Soames is gone. The crowd is gone. The bearded librarian has regained his composure and returned to work. I am sitting at desk M-1. Very far away a telephone rings.

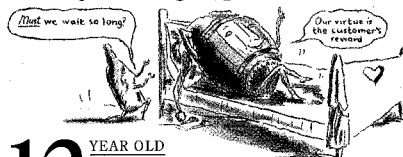
I shall never sit in this great domed room again. By November all the books will be in the library's new quarters, a modern air-conditioned monolith across town. The move was originally scheduled for around 1980, but was delayed by nearly two decades of construction problems. So in spite of the British Museum's best efforts, the Round Reading Room is here for Soames's centennial, just as Beerbohm said it would be. It's a small miracle, really—like the appearance of the new "Soames" slip in the catalogue. Like the visit of the man in the gray waterproof cape.

D. G. "Rosey" Rosenbaum didn't come to the Reading Room; he no longer corrects homework assignments. He was buried seven years ago, dressed in a smart charcoal suit, with a blood-red vest and his pince-nez, a rose in his lapel. The mourners said there was a sly smile on his face. ☞

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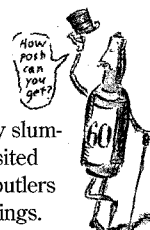
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Thin Walls, Bad Neighbors

In the new Russia making yourself at home is still no easy task

A BLUE-and-white-striped Lada sputtered to a halt on the gritty ice in front of my building. Two militiamen jumped out, responding to my telephone call for help. We exchanged salutes, and I explained my predicament: I was moving out of my apartment that morning, and my landlady, angry at losing her tenant, had barricaded herself inside with my bags. To make matters worse, I had a plane to the States to catch and was in danger of missing it because of her antics.

"If you help me out, I'll show you my gratitude," I told them. Before I moved to Moscow, bribing a law-enforcement officer was not something I had thought myself capable of. But now, without compunction, I was hiring a personal two-man commando unit.

They nodded and set to work, the younger of the two hoisting himself up the drainpipe until he reached the sturdier ironwork of the balcony on the second floor. With his Kalashnikov swinging on its shoulder strap, he scaled one balcony after another

by Jeffrey Tayler

toward mine, on the fifth floor, his boots searching for traction on the icy railings. The other officer and I climbed the stairs and took up positions at my front door. He began pounding and shouting, "Open up! Militia!" On the landing below, the neighbors huddled in a hissing, exultant throng to watch; pensioners left penniless by the inflation and reforms of the new Russia, they resented my landlady for the dollar income she earned from renting her *khreshchovka* (Khrushchev-era) flat to foreigners.

The officer on the outside finally lifted himself over the last balcony railing and knocked down the kitchen door. Hearing this, his partner shouldered open the front door and rushed in, and both began violently scolding my landlady for disobeying their order to let them in. I handed them ten dollars apiece, we saluted again, and, grabbing my bags, I bounded down the stairs toward my taxi to the cheers and warm valedictions of the pensioners.

ON the new-Russian housing scene, malevolent landladies and venal militiamen are common manifestations of the anomie that has resulted from the collapse of the police state and the impoverishment of the population. These manifestations have distinctly Soviet roots, and are often still referred to as "Soviet," especially by older Russians, despite the recent changes. When Westerners think of the means by which the former regime maintained power, vivid images come to mind: ruthless KGB operatives, gulags in Siberia, psychiatric hospitals echoing with the screams of dissidents. But in fact Soviet rule also depended on a behemoth bureaucracy that bound its citizens in regulations, the flouting of which threatened the very roofs over their heads. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union the KGB slipped into the past, but the regulations survived—and thus was born a peculiarly Russian climate of chaos, corruption, and restricted liberties.

After the 1917 revolution Russians had to abandon the notion that societal rank and personal distinction were embodied in property—that country estates signified high status, for example—and were made to accept identities debased by the tyranny of bureaucrats, little inky stamps, and dog-eared *dokumenty*. The *propiska*, or residence registration stamp, issued by the district militia, reigns to this day as king of the inkblots; it permits Russians to reside in a particular town or city and validates them as residents thereof. As a foreigner, I did not need a *propiska*—my visa, registered with OVIR, the Department of Visas and Registration, sufficed. (My landlady's *propiska*, however, allowed her to retain sovereignty in the apartment I rented

She remembers the "olden" days.

Before color television.

Her 20-year-old remembers the "olden" days.

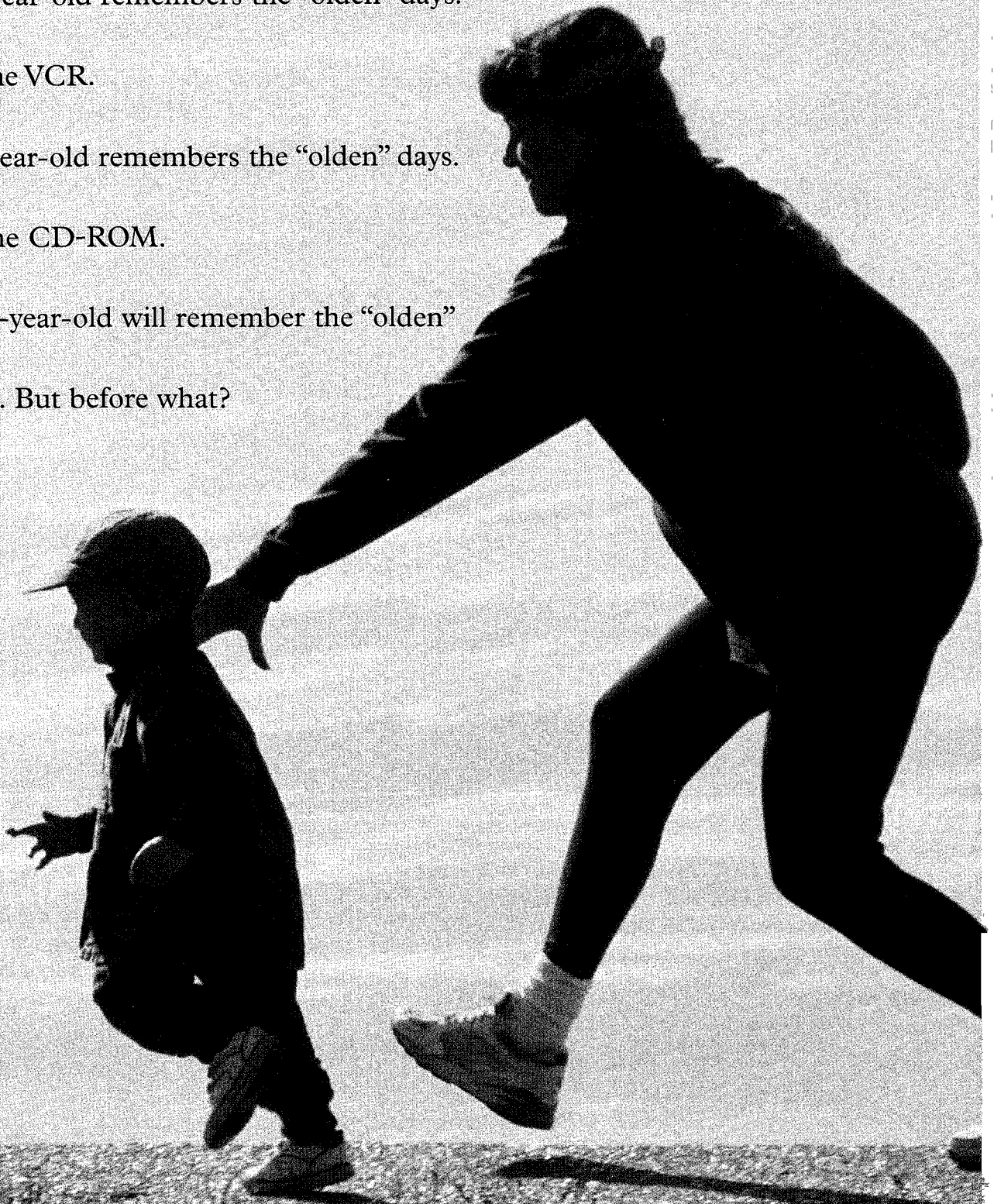
Before the VCR.

Her 10-year-old remembers the "olden" days.

Before the CD-ROM.

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days, too. But before what?



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from her; I had no legal grounds for complaint when she seized my bags on her own property.) Militias issue *propiski* only to those born within their jurisdiction, to incoming spouses of residents, to those whose employers intercede on their behalf, and to buyers of apartments; thus for generations Russians have had to marry, connive, or buy their way into the stamps. The *propiska* amounts to a municipal citizenship of sorts—those caught without the indigo blotch in their internal passports risk jail, fines, or expulsion beyond city limits. A telling proverb sums up the primacy of *propiski*, and *dokumenty* in general, in Russian life: “*Bez bumazhki ty bukashka, a s bumazhkoy chelovek*” (“Without papers you are an insect; with papers you are a person”).

Today more and more Russians, determined to avail themselves of new opportunities provided by the free market, are leaving the hinterland for the boomtowns of Moscow and St. Petersburg and are

To return to my misadventure: Without a lease or a *propiska* I was out of luck, the duty officer at the militia station told me when I first called to complain. “You see,” he said, “now that we have democracy, we can’t just go around knocking down people’s doors without the proper papers. But I’ll send over a couple of men. Maybe you can reach an agreement with them.”

And I did. The officers earned their keep, and I got my bags back and made my flight. It all worked out *po-russki* (in the Russian way).

IF geography is destiny, then housing is character. Architecturally reflective of the hurly-burly General Secretary (well known among Russians for his harebrained schemes) who ordered them erected, *khreshchovki* are slapdash five-story assemblages of concrete slabs, rattling pipes, and warped floors. Thrown up in the fifties and early sixties to meet acute housing shortages, they are now collapsing all over the former Soviet Union. Most are slated for demolition.

When I rented my apparently sound one-bedroom *khreshchovka* in a leafy suburb of Moscow, I did so on impulse, attracted by its picture window giving onto a park and by its white walls (Russian homes are usually wallpapered in greens, browns, and beiges). Soon after I moved in, however, I began to think of my new abode as a ramshackle cement chamber of horrors that I would have to survive rather than simply adjust to. To live in a *khreshchovka*, I learned, is to suffer a degradation of the Adamic self and a gradual reconstitution as a guileful *Homo sovieticus*. The endless domestic quarrels on the other side of the thin walls, the watchdog neighbors with their grudges and envy, the ceilings that flood with the vigorous showers of tenants upstairs—all these provide an education in misanthropy. Life becomes a montage of grief and spite in which there are always a culprit and a reason for animosity.

One predawn hour in my *khreshchovka* I was rocketed out of slumber by music—the national anthem, on the state-run Radio Mayak. The radio in the apartment below was blasting through my floor and into the autumnal darkness beyond my windows. The news followed, and then Michael Jackson’s “Beat It,” and a report on Russian com-

posers in Europe . . . on and on, all day, until the sign-off after midnight.

I tried to reason with myself. I am living in Russia, I thought. Russians are tolerant; I must be tolerant. I embraced this as a verity; I murmured it over and over. But when the third dawn in a row broke with the anthem, I called my landlady and complained. She railed against the “witch” in the apartment below, concluding, “This is our Soviet reality: thin walls and bad neighbors. You must endure. We Russians endure. It is our Soviet reality . . .”

I endured, but I decided to broach the subject gently with the neighbor herself. The man in the apartment next to hers cracked his door when he heard me knocking. “She won’t answer,” he said. “You’re bothered by the radio, I suppose. So was the last tenant. The old witch is doing it on purpose to get at your landlady, so you’ll move out.”

I went to the *zhuk*, or local housing authority, to file a complaint, but without a *propiska* I was shooed away—like an insect.

Weeks of Radio Mayak passed, and winter came. With the windows shut tight against the cold, my apartment resounded more than ever with anthems, Russian pop, Zhirinovskiy’s tirades. I endured—and quietly began losing my mind. I finally considered moving out.

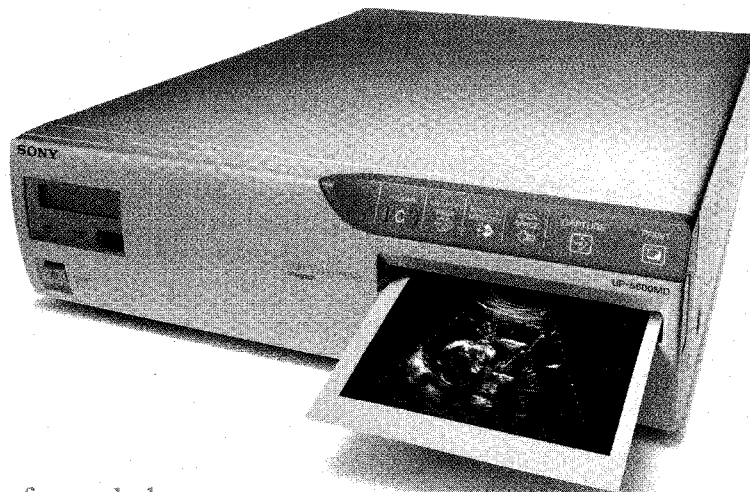
“Endure?” my friend Yuri said when I called to tell him that my phone number might be changing. “Listen—you know what Raskolnikov did. Take an ax, wrap it in paper, knock on her door. When the old hag opens . . .” We laughed, and then his voice steadied. “You’re thinking like an American. That sort of cultural sensitivity—talk about enduring and such—leaves you only one choice in Russia: dig your grave and climb in. You have to adapt to our Soviet reality.” He paused and then asked about the fuse box on the floor below me. “Her radio comes through the electrical network. You just have to cut one wire—the clear one—and poof! No Radio Mayak! It’s easy.”

That night I stole downstairs with a pair of scissors, pried open the fuse box in the hall, and was confronted with a welter of wires, one of which looked relatively clear. I cut it. I felt my face blanch: the radio was still blaring. I snipped again, and then again—no result. The next morning one of the pensioners in my

Until Moscow, bribing a law-enforcement officer was not something I had thought myself capable of.

living on the lam, as it were, without *propiski*. They need to rent apartments—but leases are almost unheard of. By law the lessors—possessors of *propiski*—must register leases with the Tax Inspectorate and pay tax on the rent received, but, ever wary of contact with the state and reluctant to pay taxes, they usually do neither. Similarly, lessees without *propiski* do not want to announce themselves as such. Thus most end up making oral agreements with landlords and paying the rent in cash (as I did). The leaseless, however, are at the mercy of their landlords, liable to summary eviction when, for instance, a potentially more remunerative tenant turns up. Russians (and foreigners) without *propiski* are indeed “insects,” with no effective recourse should disputes with their landlords arise. Hence the bribery.

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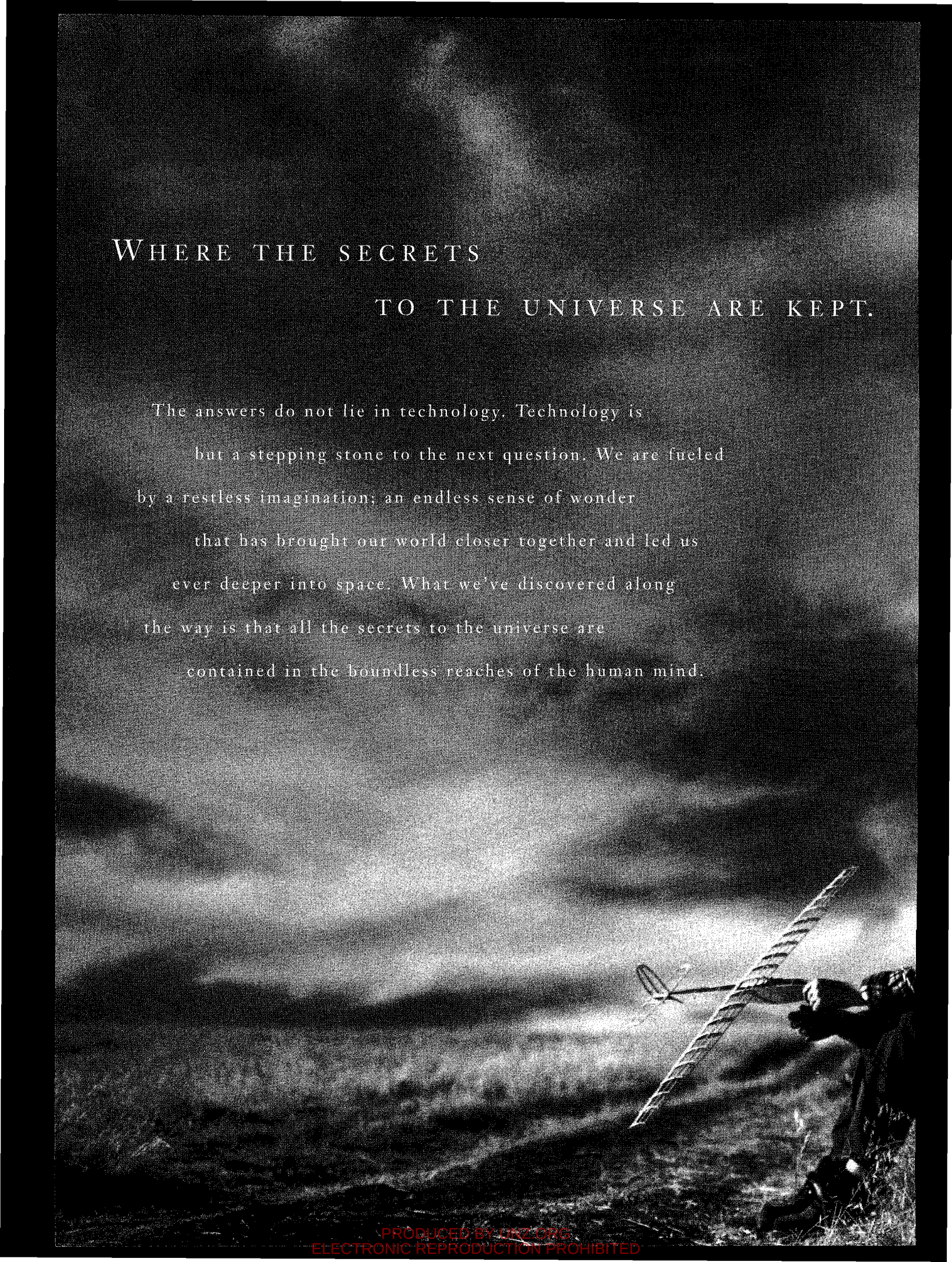


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that has brought our world closer together and led us
ever deeper into space. What we've discovered along
the way is that all the secrets to the universe are
contained in the boundless reaches of the human mind.

Q **BOEING**

building stopped me on the stairwell and exclaimed, "Hooligans! Hooligans cut our phone lines! Nowadays we have no order in our country. Look at what Gorbachev and democracy have done to us!"

His electrical talents having come up short, Yuri rose to the challenge with a second plan, based squarely on the core elements of post-Soviet reality: deceit, bribery, and vodka. At his urging I returned to the *zhek* to complain that my electricity had failed. As soon as I crossed the threshold, the two women behind the desk cut short their gossip session and leveled a contemptuous look at me ("Insect!"). But I was undeterred.

"I have an electrical problem," I said. "Maybe we can reach an agreement . . ." I produced a crisp dollar bill and rendered myself human enough to earn a place on the repairman's schedule. The next morning a disheveled prole in brogans appeared at my door with a toolbox, scratching his head. I explained about the radio.

"Ahhh. Now, listen," he responded, "what you are asking me to do could cost me my job . . . hooliganism . . . immoral besides . . . The poor old woman is afraid of thieves, so she keeps the radio on. This is our Soviet reality."

"Maybe we can reach an agreement," I suggested. I pulled out a liter bottle of Rasputin vodka. His eyes widened and he rubbed his chin.

"Well, it is the end of the month, and the guys in my unit need to celebrate. What the heck." He slipped the bottle into his coat pocket and pulled out his wire clippers.

That evening I enjoyed a blissful silence. Hooliganism provided a profitable Soviet-style symbiosis for the electrician and me: I worked better than ever in my newfound tranquillity, and he made money cutting radio lines (and, eventually, splicing them back together). Through the failings of my *khrushchovka* and the spite of my neighbor I had become a Soviet man—though I was not proud of it. "Who is?" Yuri said.

MY landlady called one frigid afternoon to tell me about the winter radiator ritual I would have to perform (a simple matter of turning a knob and draining off excess fluid, she said), which would also benefit all my neighbors' radiators—and, she added casually, prevent

"an explosion that might result from a buildup of steam." While she stayed on the phone, I knelt beside the piping in the kitchen and discovered that the knob had rusted itself into immobility.

"Impossible," she chirped. "Just give it a tap with a screwdriver." I tapped the knob gently; when I turned it, the whole thing came off in my hand. Two buckets' worth of water streamed out onto my floor. The radiator sighed and went cold.

"No problem. My husband is on his way now to fix it," the landlady said. "No problem."

An hour later the husband stood before me on the hallway doormat in mud-caked boots. He had a dazed, effete look. A bulbous fur hat topped his head, and his eyes appeared crossed. My next-door neighbor, Nikolai—a gentle, befuddled pensioner who always looked out for me—stood behind him, arms akimbo, shaking his head in silence, as if witnessing the opening act of a tragedy he had seen repeatedly.

"I am an artist—a *peintre*, if you will—who works with oils," the husband said, introducing himself. "Not watercolors, mind you. Oils."

"Well, would you at least step inside and take a look at the radiator?" I said. "What am I supposed to do?"

"I don't want to mess up your floor. I will send over workers from the *zhek* immediately!" He turned and pranced down the stairs, his fur earflaps flapping.

Nikolai shook his head. "Our workers . . ." he said. "They aren't like your workers in the West. These are Soviet workers." He shook his head again.

Three days passed. A glacial cold permeated my apartment and the four beneath me: my infelicitous turn of the knob had knocked out the heating for the entire column. This earned me less than friendly looks from my neighbors when we passed in the stairwell. Nikolai was sympathetic to me—but his apartment was unaffected.

On the fourth morning I heard feet stomping and scraping in the hallway, followed by oaths and hacking coughs and lusty expectorations. I opened my door. Two middle-aged laborers—one tall, thin, and wizened, the other short, bullnecked, and weathered, a sort of Russian Laurel and Hardy—stood puffing vodka-scented white vapor into the blue stairwell. Nikolai emerged from

his apartment and eyed them, shaking his head.

"From the *zhek*," the bullnecked man grunted. "Got a glass for us?"

"A glass?"

"Vodka! To warm us up."

"Sorry, I don't drink."

Nikolai followed them in and asked me to wait in the living room. In my kitchen an hour later hammers were pounding, pipes were clanging, and metal was sawing through metal. Nikolai stood guard, shouting orders at the workers about wrenches and bolts. A sound like a serrated knife ripping through sandpaper was followed by a prolonged cacophony of drilling, oaths, and fervent expostulations.

"Done," the bullnecked man said. He and his partner stomped out the door past Nikolai.

I rushed into the kitchen. The flooring, a sort of blue linoleum, was torn to shreds for a square yard around the radiator. Bas-relief mud footprints were every-

*My landlady called
one frigid afternoon
to tell me about the
radiator ritual I would
have to perform.*

where. A leg had been knocked off the breakfast table. One of the men had wiped his black and greasy hands on the white curtains. The room smelled of sweat and vodka breath.

Nikolai put his hand on my shoulder. "Our workers still have a Soviet mentality and are somewhat careless," he said. "This is our Soviet reality. But your radiator now works."

MOLDERING in grime, *pod'yezdy*, the common entranceways to apartment buildings, embody both the moral bankruptcy of Soviet ideology and the decay that accompanies current lurches toward a free market. The Soviet concept of "the people's property" engendered disdain and negligence toward almost everything owned by "the people" (that is, the state). A sense of com-

munal responsibility is still absent and unmissed, and public areas are growing increasingly squalid as state maintenance services diminish.

Our *pod'yezd* was little more than a doorless, snowblown cavern, and as such served as a shelter for threesomes of wayward husbands with their bottles, and for youths who gathered to smoke and banter. Like all things Soviet, it had its state-hired taskmaster: a middle-aged charwoman who showed up each morning in ritual rancor to spray disinfectant in the corners, rearrange the dust in the stairwell, and shovel snow off the outer walkways onto the shoes of passing pedestrians. She might also shoo away bums with her broom or yank cigarettes out of the hands of teenage girls; she was the gnomish enforcer of the common good.

The charwoman and the dirt aside, the *pod'yezd* had its charms; it was Nikolai's favorite haunt. He would stand there smoking his Belomor Kanal cigarettes (named for the canal that Stalin sent legions of political prisoners to build in the subarctic north; Russians often pun Belomor to "*belle mort*"). The acrid stench would waft under my door, and Nikolai's hack would echo in the stairwell. I would often come out to talk with him.

"The city is planning to demolish this building and move us to a new development," Nikolai told me after the radiator affair. "But we've lived here since Khrushchev, since our youth." He took a puff and scratched his head. "Our youth. Since '91 our world has come apart—our youth has slipped into the dustbin of history, as Americans like to say. Maybe by American standards this *khrushchovka* is a dump, but it's what we have known. It's where my wife and I have lived our life together. I can't imagine I could ever really move."

He never had to. A week later Nikolai's hack disappeared from the *pod'yezd*. I came upon his wife on the landing; she stood before me, tiny and red-eyed and trembling. The night before, Nikolai had had a stroke and died, she said. She broke down in front of me, and her sobs echoed off the walls. Minutes later the neighbors came out to console her. They gathered around her—a huddle of pensioners in the stairwell of a building soon to be crushed into rubble, aged castaways from the defunct and discredited era to which they, and their *khrushchovka*, still belonged. ☞

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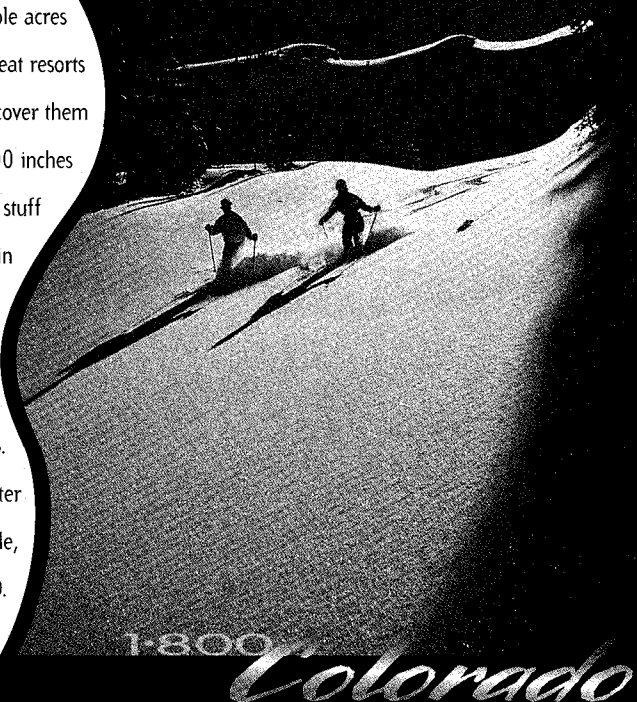
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Q: When is a **NETIZEN** not a **NEWBIE**?

A: When he's an **INTERNAUT**. (A **NETIZEN** communicates on line. A **NEWBIE** is a beginner at it, and an **INTERNAUT** does it all the time.)

Q: When is a **SPIDER** like a **ROBOT**?

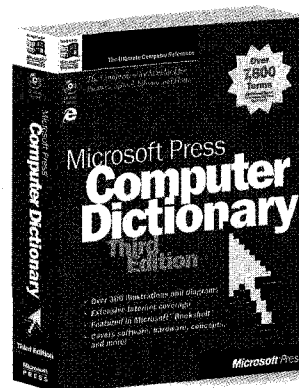
A: When it's an **INTELLIGENT AGENT**. (All three are ways to search the Internet.)

Q: How do you use a **MANDELBROT SET**?

A: The same way you use a **FRACAL**. (They are the names given by mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot to a class of "self-similar" shapes used by computer graphics technicians to generate nature-like images.)

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A Taste of Asia

*Learning to cook Thai
food can be a highlight of a trip
to Thailand*

THE freshness, subtlety, and exoticism of Thai food lead people to think that the country responsible for such food must be beautiful, and of course they're right. When the opportunity to visit Thailand presented itself last year, I pursued my favorite way to understand a country's culture—through its cuisine. My idea was to take and compare several cooking courses; because Thais are well aware that food is a draw for tourists, I was able to choose from a number of courses taught in English. (In recent months the

by Corby Kummer

unstable Thai currency has led to political and economic instability, and so tourists are well advised to keep an eye on international news when planning a trip.) The places I visited to take courses are on the itineraries of many first-time visitors: Bangkok; Phuket, the resort island in the south; and Chiang Mai, an inviting and human-scaled city in the north.

Class-going gave my days structure, and because most classes ended with lunch, leaving the rest of the day free, I could do all the sightseeing I wanted.

When I got back to the United States, I was able to relive the trip far more evocatively than I ever could by looking at snapshots—by making my hands lemony with lemongrass pounded to release its fresh juices, staining them orange with fresh turmeric, and smelling the essential oils of kaffir lime leaves, a flavoring ubiquitous in Thai cooking. Getting the scent of a country's food on your hands helps you get its spirit in your mind.

MOST visitors pass through Bangkok, the wise ones as quickly as possible. I took to traveling by water only, the best way to avoid the notorious traffic. Taking a motor-powered "long-tail" boat or a steamboat shuttle down the Chao Phraya, the wide river that curves through the city, is still enchanting, offering views of gilded, brightly painted temples and the few low white-stucco buildings that have escaped demolition in the city's ceaseless construction (the buildings would be described as colonial-era had Thailand ever been a colony). Fifty miles down the river is Ayuthaya, the roy-



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al capital that Bangkok replaced; its extraordinary pylon-like temples, now magnificent ruins on neatly tended lawns, were the models for Bangkok's better-known but relatively mechanical-looking temples. Ayuthaya is as memorable as it is obligatory to visit, and as tranquil as Bangkok is frenetic.

My most pleasurable Bangkok excursion was heading up the river a much shorter distance to a cooking class at the Thai House, a small hotel built in the form of a traditional raised wooden Thai home, with temple-like pitched roofs. Gliding through the *klongs*, or canals, provides a tour of the city's back streets, where the pace is relaxed. People stroll in and out of the markets and ornate temples that face the canals; children paddle in the water and women wash their hair in it. By the time you arrive on the porch of the intimate hotel, having traversed progressively narrower canals, you feel much farther from the city center than the fourteen miles and forty-five minutes of travel would imply.

Pip and Paiboone Fragrajang, the couple who built and run the hotel, want to immerse guests in typical Thai village life. Even if the immersion is actually into the upper middle class in a suburb of a surprisingly modern city (Bangkok was founded only in 1782), it still seems like a journey into the past. I didn't stay at the hotel, with its traditional grouping of bedrooms around a second-floor courtyard, but I longed to try the teak-lined repose offered by the low beds, away from modern conveniences: there are fans but no air-conditioners in the surprisingly fresh rooms; bathrooms are shared.

Classes here are relaxed, familial, and fun. Students sit around a wooden trestle table and listen to Pip explain in her imperfect but confident English the ingredients for the few simple dishes that everyone will spend the day preparing together. Some mornings begin with a trip to the local market in the village. Demonstrations are outdoors, near the garden and a small orchard where students can pick herbs, mangoes, and bananas. The full course lasts four days, but you may attend a day at a time. If you call a day ahead (the number is 011-662-280-0740), someone will fetch you early in the morning at your downtown hotel, take you by van and boat to

class, and bring you back in the late afternoon. The daily charge is about \$80, including transportation, and the four-day program, including room and board, costs about \$500.

Pip wants students to enjoy themselves and to take initiative, and they do. A fundamental of Thai cooking is pounding chile paste with a mortar and pestle; the ingredients of the paste change by region and dish, but the repetitive motion and releasing of fragrance produces what Patience Gray calls, in her 1986 book *Honey From a Weed*, "an alteration in one's being—from sighing with fatigue to inhaling with pleasure." After we had each taken a turn pounding a green-chile paste for *kaeng kheo waan neua*, or green beef curry—which included the always refreshing lemongrass, gingerlike galanga, sweet fresh coconut milk, and several pungent fresh chiles—I happened on an old woman sitting on the concrete path beside the kitchen, making the same paste for everyone's lunch. As she cradled the family-size mortar in one arm and pounded and stirred with the other, she looked deeply content.

IN the city itself the oases are the luxury hotels, including the Regent, the Sukhothai, and the Shangri-La, and—perhaps the most tranquilizing oasis of all—the Oriental Spa, which includes a professional-caliber cooking school, just across the Chao Phraya from the legendary Oriental Hotel. Private ferries shuttle between the hotel, which has a stolid British modernity, and the spa's charming turn-of-the-century buildings, which once housed a paper factory. The school has an international reputation because of the curriculum established by its founder, Chalie Amatyakul.

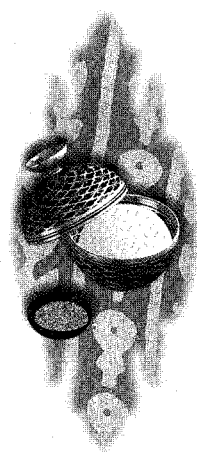
With its chalkboards, fans whirring beneath pitched wooden ceilings, and little notebooks set out for the students on rows of wooden desks, the classroom seems like a set for *The King and I*. Each day's general subjects are fixed, but don't worry if the subjects for a morning you can spare do not include your favorite part of a meal: as in any well-planned class, the

conversation and information dispensed are wide-ranging. Classes meet Monday through Thursday, starting promptly at 9:00 A.M. and ending with lunch at about 1:00. Anyone may register on a day's notice, provided that the limit of fifteen students has not been reached; the cost is about \$100 per class. (I had little trouble getting a place in classes, but you can register before your trip: the hotel's number is 011-662-236-0400, and the school's secretary faxes confirmations.)

The dishes here are citized and complex, and students don't cook much. The white, servant-filled classrooms discourage getting one's hands dirty—which is just as well, considering the silk shirts and gold bracelets and polished long fingernails of many of the students. The woks, brassed copper, are of the best quality, as are the ingredients.

So, I should say, is the information—which is why anyone with a serious interest in understanding Thai cuisine should attend at least one class here. No program offers more nuances of ingredients and technique, or a deeper look at regional variations in recipes and into the Thai style and philosophy of eating. A fellow student of mine had left his restaurant in Sydney, Australia, for a week to come and learn—quite a tribute from a chef. Also, the school's location in the spa offers the luxurious possibility of getting (at an additional charge) an expert Thai massage or a beauty treatment after a disciplined morning. This may not be quite the same as plunging into a pool or an ocean, but it's utterly relaxing.

COOKING students at The Boat-house, on Phuket, *can* plunge into the ocean, just outside the dining room, after a morning's work. The island became famous as a rest spot for several sorts of tourists; the beaches are still beautiful, and the red-light district still thrives, though now it is limited mostly to the small urban area of Patong and recreation is generally wholesome, at the vast and sumptuous Club Med and other resorts. This is where anyone who wants to relax on a beach while visiting Thai-



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land (or, for that matter, Singapore, which is close by) heads.

Many Phuket regulars stay at The Boathouse, a small hotel right on one of the island's best beaches, at Kata (the telephone number is 011-66-76-330-557, but you may find it easier to communicate with the hotel through its Internet site, at <http://www.theboathousephuket.com>). The hotel began life as a restaurant and local guesthouse built by M. L. Tri Devakul, an architect and aristocrat who still owns (and tinkers with) it. In their trim detail the rooms resemble commodious staterooms, and they and the small pool are up to resort standards. But it is the setting and the personal style of management that draw repeat guests. And the food: the restaurant is the island's best, and the wine cellar might be the best in Thailand, where high import taxes discourage the collecting of fine wines.

Every weekend the chef, Tummanoon Puchan, gives two morning cooking classes in the dining room, whose several walls of glass doors open onto the pool and the beach. The classes, which end with lunch, are included in hotel package rates but are open to anyone, at a charge of about \$50 for both days.

Puchan keeps things moving without ever seeming hurried. Ten minutes into the first lesson he had every student kneading meatballs by hand. The ground-meat mixture contained all the herbs that he had begun the class by showing both whole and cut up, including lemon-grass, garlic, shallots, ginger, and galanga; kaffir lime leaf, which he showed us how to devein, roll into a tight cylinder, and slice into chiffonade to be used as a flavoring and garnish; cilantro; basil both common and "holy," which has a stronger, spicier flavor; and fresh turmeric, which looks like a cross between ginger and carrot and has a pungent but refreshing flavor (and stains everything it touches). The powerful fragrances stayed on our fingers for the rest of the class.

Puchan concentrated on the stronger-flavored foods typical of his home village in southern Thailand, and ex-

plained how recipes that might at first glance seem Chinese in fact differed; for example, Thai dishes contain brown palm sugar, and no sesame oil or cornstarch. The recipes were streamlined and easy to reproduce at home—especially a Singaporean variation of pad thai, which in America has become the Thai chow mein for its irresistible comfort-food combination of noodles, eggs, peanuts, and sugar, along with plenty of salt and hot chile. Other Thai cooks complicate this dish, but Puchan's version was so easy and so good that students kept finding excuses to stir-fry another batch.

CHIANG Mai, in the northern region bordering Burma and Laos, is among the secondary cities in Asia that are far more manageable and pleasant than their countries' largest cities, as James Fallow has pointed out in these pages, and I wished I could spend much longer than the three days I had allotted it. I would go back just to stay at the Regent, my idea of a dream luxury resort, a twenty-mile ride from town on roads as wide and uncrowded as Bangkok's are narrow and impassable. The Regent was built around a working rice paddy, created from fields to be the center of the lushly landscaped hotel, which comprises many small buildings. It takes a day to get used to the idea that the loosely

clad workers tilling the fields or shepherding the hotel's family of water buffaloes are there just for atmosphere. (The

small crop of rice is harvested and given to the community rather than being cooked by the hotel's chef.) Yet daily encounters with the

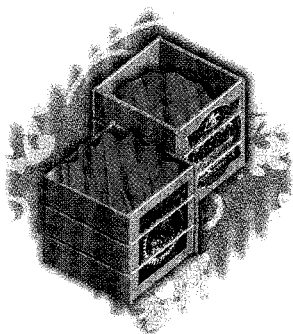
workers make you feel that you're somehow participating in the true life of the region.

Midway between the relatively tranquil city center and the Regent is the Chiang Mai Thai Cookery School, in the modern ranch house of Somphon and Elizabeth Nabnian, a couple who met when Elizabeth was teaching English in Chiang Mai. Students gather at the school's storefront office, on a central street near the city gates (one of the couple's small children is likely to

be playing on the floor), and make the fifteen-minute trip in an open-sided station wagon to the pleasant middle-class suburb of Doi Saket. A full course lasts three days, but single classes are available (the cost is about \$60 for three days and \$20 for one; the number is 011-66-53-206-388, and an Internet site that features full lesson plans is at <http://www.infothai.com/wtcmcr/s/cmcook.htm>). Perhaps because of a listing in the Lonely Planet guide, the class I attended was full of quirky, friendly Americans, most of whom were carrying backpacks.

Classes begin with students seated, shoes off, on patterned woven mats that cover the floor (there are cushioned backrests) in a circle around Somphon, who explains in his scholarly English the ingredients of all Thai cooking and especially those of his native city, Chiang Rai. Hearing his stories of growing up mixing fish sauce into nearly every dish finally began to reconcile me to the salty, dark, slightly putrid yet also sweet sauce, one whiff of which sends you straight to Thailand. Somphon has lived and cooked in England, and he keeps the emphasis on the practical: how to buy the best fish sauce (look at the price, not the label); how to tell if shrimp are diseased (the tails look nibbled on); how long to soak mung-bean noodles; how to soften fresh, molasseslike palm sugar if you're lucky enough to find it where you live; how to wrap and smash a coconut and grate the flesh in a food processor to make coconut milk. The classes move into the small demonstration kitchen, where Somphon cooks with minimal student participation. They continue with lunch, and end with a walk in the garden to see how lemon-grass, holy basil, and other herbs grow.

Like the city, the school is modest, straightforward, and up-to-date. In Chiang Mai I felt most thoroughly in another culture, as I visited the handicrafts shops that were part of a royal project to support mountain villages; as I shopped for silk and ceramics, for whose production the region is famous; and as I bicycled to the local orchid and butterfly farms. Now, at home smelling jasmine rice cook, I think of the water buffaloes and the crickets and cicadas keeping the paddies alive through the night. ☸



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In a nation as self-consciously aware of potential as ours has been, contemplation of the future possesses some of the stabilizing function of tradition. To mark its 140th anniversary, The Atlantic will publish over the next year or two a series of articles that look at aspects of the long-term future for the nation and the world. The subjects will be diverse, ranging from issues in the physical and biological sciences to issues of intellect and philosophy to mundane but far-reaching issues involving politics, demography, and the environment. In the first of these articles the distinguished physicist Freeman J. Dyson discusses the inevitability of human colonization of the solar system and how it might come about. ►



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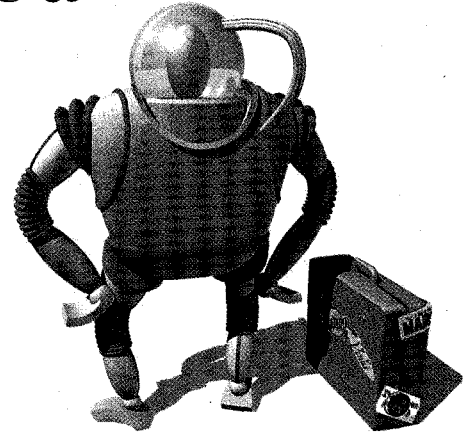
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Warm-Blooded Plants and Freeze-Dried Fish

by

FREEMAN J. DYSON



ABOUT twelve years ago I visited the Johnson Space Center, in Houston, and climbed around in the space shuttle that is kept there for visitors to examine. That was before the *Challenger* disaster, when the shuttle was advertised as a safe ride for congressmen and schoolteachers. What impressed me about the shuttle was the immense quantity of stuff on board for the care and comfort of human passengers. It felt more like a hotel or a hospital than a rocket ship. I made rough calculations of how many tons of material were needed to keep seven passengers alive and well for a couple of weeks. I was thinking, Why don't we rip all this out and fly the thing from the ground by remote control?

At that time most of the shuttle missions were carrying unmanned satellites into orbit for various purposes—some scientific, some commercial, and some military. These launching jobs could just as well have been done automatically. Only a few of the shuttle missions really need people on board, to do experiments or to repair the Hubble Space Telescope, for example. It would have made sense to reserve two shuttle ships with all their hotel equipment for missions in which people were essential and to use the other two for satellite-launching jobs. A freight-

only version of the shuttle could carry bigger payloads for less money than the passenger version, without risking any lives. Unfortunately, when I suggested this to people at Houston, they did not think it was a good idea. Their whole existence is centered on the training of astronauts and the operation of manned missions.

When
emigration
from Earth to a
planet or a
comet becomes
cheap enough
for ordinary
people to
afford, people
will emigrate

After failing to eviscerate the shuttle, I wandered into the museum of the Johnson Space Center, where there is a collection of rocks that astronauts brought back from the Moon. Many of the Moon rocks have been lent to scientists in other places, but a large number remain in Houston. Scientists who are interested in Moon rocks are usually also interested in meteorites: their tools for analyzing meteorites work on Moon rocks as well. The space-center museum has a fine collection of meteorites, too, some of which were sitting in glass cases next to the Moon rocks. Among them were two from Mars.

It seemed like a miracle. Here I was, in the museum in Houston, twelve inches away from a piece of Mars, with only a thin pane of glass to stop me from grabbing hold of it. In those days the National Aeronautics and Space Administration was talking seriously about grandiose missions to Mars, costing many billions of dollars. One of the reasons

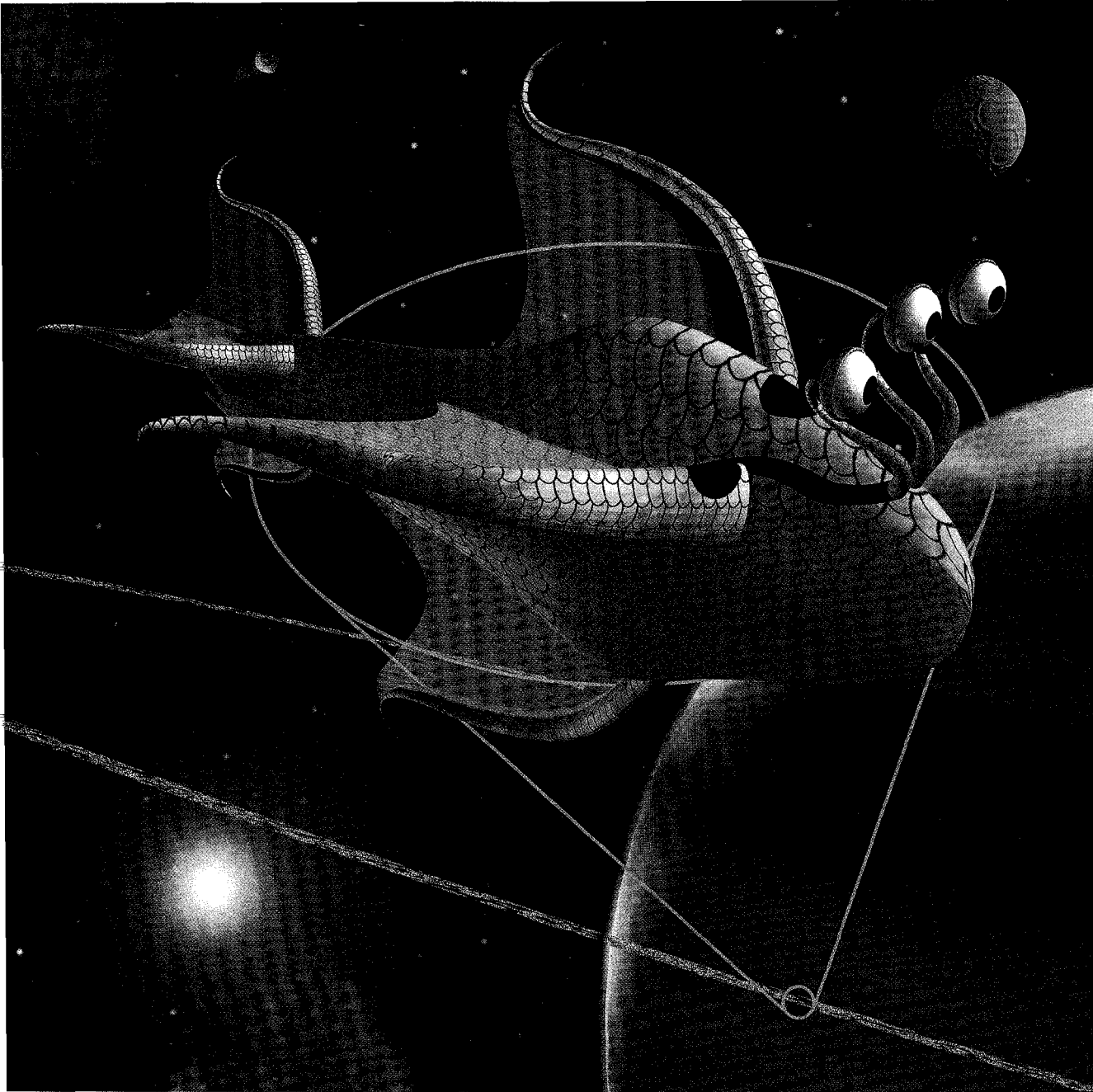




for going to Mars was to bring back samples of rock for scientists to analyze. And here were samples of Mars rock already in Houston, provided by nature free of charge. I found it odd that nobody seemed to be studying them. As far as I could tell, I was the only person in Houston who was excited about the Mars rocks. I stood and gazed at them for a long time. Nobody else came to look at them. I remarked to the NASA people that they might usefully spend some time studying the Mars rocks they already had, instead of planning billion-dollar missions to collect more.

At that time the administrators in Houston seemed little interested in anything that did not cost billions of dollars.

Things have changed since then. Now NASA is interested in cheap missions, and many more scientists are interested in Mars rocks. Last year some of the rocks were examined more thoroughly than ever before. Two contain chemical traces that might be interpreted as evidence of ancient life on Mars, and scientists have also found microscopic structures that might be relics of ancient microbes. The evidence that these traces have anything to do with bi-



ology is highly dubious; we cannot say on the basis of it that life must have existed on Mars. These traces are important for two other reasons. First, if we are seriously interested in finding evidence of life on Mars, we now know that Mars rocks on Earth are the most convenient place to look for it. Instead of waiting for many years for an expensive sampling mission to land on Mars and return a few small chips of rock to Earth, we can find a supply of bigger chips lying in Antarctica, where meteorites accumulate on the ice and are freely available. Second, these rocks show

that if life was established on Mars at any time in the past, it could have been transported to Earth intact. In the first billion years after the solar system was formed, when Mars had a warm climate and abundant water, asteroid impacts were much more frequent than they are now. Mars rocks fell on Earth in great numbers, and many Earth rocks must also have fallen on Mars. We should not be surprised if we find that life, wherever it originated, spread rapidly from one planet to another. Whatever creatures we may find on Mars will probably be either our ancestors or our cousins.



The Europa Ocean

ANOTHER place where life might now be flourishing is in a deep ocean on Jupiter's satellite Europa. Jupiter has four large satellites, discovered almost 400 years ago by Galileo: Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto, in order of their increasing distance from Jupiter. The *Galileo* spacecraft now orbiting Jupiter is sending back splendid pictures of the satellites. The new pictures of Europa show a smooth, icy surface with many large cracks but very few craters. It looks as if the ice is floating on a liquid ocean and being fractured from time to time by movements of the water underneath. The pictures are strikingly similar to some pictures of the ice that floats on the Arctic Ocean; it would not be surprising if Europa had a warm ocean under the ice. Io is blazing hot, with active volcanoes on its surface; Ganymede's surface is icy like Europa's but not so smooth; and Callisto looks like a solid ball of ice covered with ancient craters. All four satellites are heated internally by the tidal effects of the huge mass of Jupiter, but the internal heating falls off rapidly with

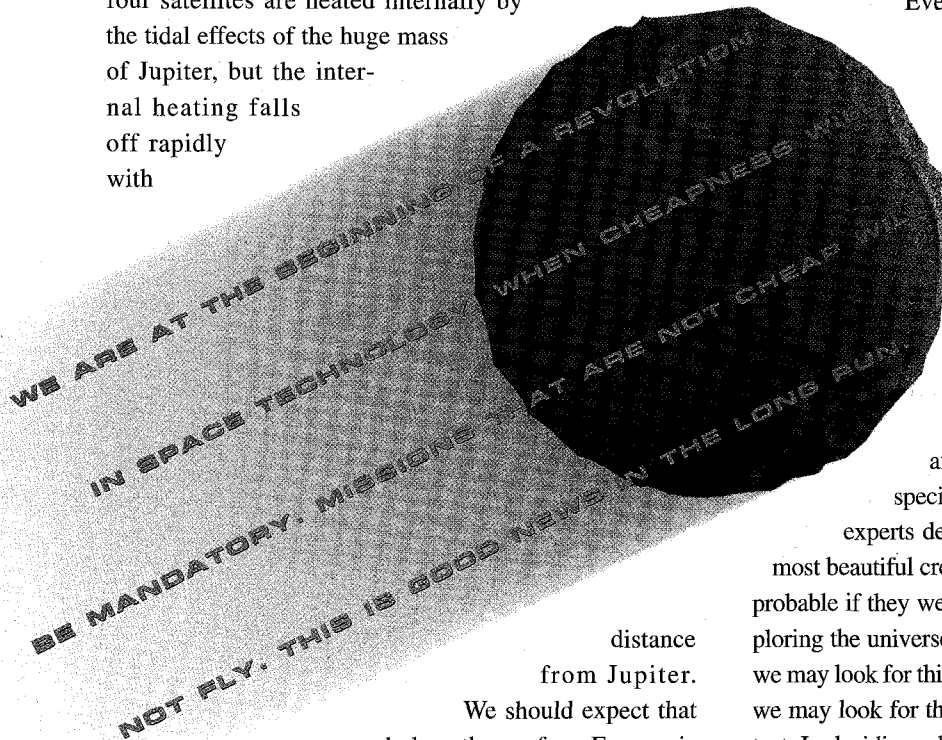
of ice. Of all the worlds that we have explored beyond Earth, Mars and Europa are the most promising places to look for life.

To land a spacecraft on Europa, with the heavy equipment needed to penetrate the ice and explore the ocean directly, would be a formidable undertaking. A direct search for life in Europa's ocean would today be prohibitively expensive. But just as asteroid and comet impacts on Mars have given us an easier way to look for evidence of life on that planet, impacts on Europa give us an easier way to look for evidence of life there. Every time a major impact occurs on Europa, a vast quantity of water is splashed from the ocean into the space around Jupiter. Some of the water evaporates, and some condenses into snow. Creatures living in the water far enough from the impact have a chance of being splashed intact into space and quickly freeze-dried. Therefore, an easy way to look for evidence of life in Europa's ocean is to look for freeze-dried fish in the ring of space debris orbiting Jupiter. Sending a spacecraft to visit and survey Jupiter's ring would be far less expensive than sending a submarine to visit and survey Europa's ocean.

Even if we did not find freeze-dried fish in Jupiter's ring, we might find other surprises—freeze-dried seaweed, or a freeze-dried sea monster.

Freeze-dried fish orbiting Jupiter is a fanciful notion, but nature in the biological realm has a tendency to be fanciful. Nature is usually more imaginative than we are. Nobody in Europe ever imagined a bird of paradise or a duck-billed platypus before it was discovered by explorers. Even after the platypus was discovered and a specimen brought to London, several learned experts declared it to be a fake. Many of nature's most beautiful creations might be dismissed as wildly improbable if they were not known to exist. When we are exploring the universe and looking for evidence of life, either we may look for things that are probable but hard to detect or we may look for things that are improbable but easy to detect. In deciding what to look for, detectability is at least as useful a criterion as probability. Primitive organisms such as bacteria and algae hidden underground may be more probable, but freeze-dried fish in orbit are more detectable. To have the best chance of success, we should keep our eyes open for all possibilities.

A similar logic suggests warm-blooded plants as a rea-



distance
from Jupiter.

We should expect that below the surface Europa is much cooler than Io and much warmer than Ganymede and Callisto. Since Io is hot enough to boil away all its water, and Callisto is cold enough to freeze solid, Europa might well have a warm liquid ocean. Ganymede might also have a liquid ocean, but it would be covered by a much thicker layer



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THE FUTURE OF SPACE EXPLORATION

sonable target in the search for life on the surface of Mars. By "warm-blooded" I do not mean that the plant will have a circulatory system or a precise temperature control. I mean only that the plant will be able to keep its internal temperature within the normal range of a cool greenhouse, roughly freezing to 80° Fahrenheit. Any form of life that survived on Mars from the early, warm and wet era to the present, cold and dry era had two alternatives: either it adopted an entirely subterranean lifestyle, retreating deep underground to places where liquid water could be found, or it remained on the surface and learned to protect itself against cold and dryness by growing around itself an insulating greenhouse to maintain a warm and moist environment. The first alternative is more likely but would be

much more difficult to detect. Organisms living deep underground, without sunlight, would probably be microscopic, like the bacteria that live deep in the earth. To find such organisms would require deep drilling and heavy machinery. The second alternative, though less likely, would be easier to detect. The two missions that arrived at Mars this year—the *Pathfinder*, landing on the surface, and the *Global Surveyor*, remaining in orbit—are not intended to detect living greenhouses or other possible forms of life. Their purpose is to explore the planet in a general way and to raise questions that later missions could answer.

Many species of terrestrial plants, including the skunk cabbage that sprouts in February in the woods of Princeton, New Jersey, where I live, are warm-blooded to a limited ex-

THE NEW WORLD

A man roams the streets with a basket
of freestone peaches hollering, "Peaches,
peaches, yellow freestone peaches for sale."

My grandfather in his prime could shout
the Tigers of Wrath or the factory whistles
along the river. Hamtramck hungered

for yellow freestone peaches, downriver
wakened from a dream of work, Zug Island danced
into the bright day glad to be alive.

Full-figured women in their negligees
streamed into the streets from the dark doorways
to demand in Polish or Armenian

the ripened offerings of this new world.
Josef Priscuknick out of Dubrovitsa
to Detroit by way of Ellis Island

raised himself regally to his full height
of five feet two and transacted until
the fruit was gone into those eager hands.

Thus would there be a letter sent across
an ocean and a continent, and thus
would Sadie waken to the news of wealth

without limit in the bright and distant land,
and thus bags were packed and she set sail
for America. Some of this is true.

The women were gaunt. All day the kids dug
in the back lots searching for anything.
The place was Russia with another name.

Joe was five feet two. Dubrovitsa burned
to gray ashes the west wind carried off,
then Rovno went, then the Dnieper turned to dust.

We sat around the table telling lies
while the late light filled an empty glass.
Bread, onions, the smell of burning butter,

small white potatoes we shared with no one
because the hour was wrong, the guest was late,
and this was Michigan in 1928.

—PHILIP LEVINE

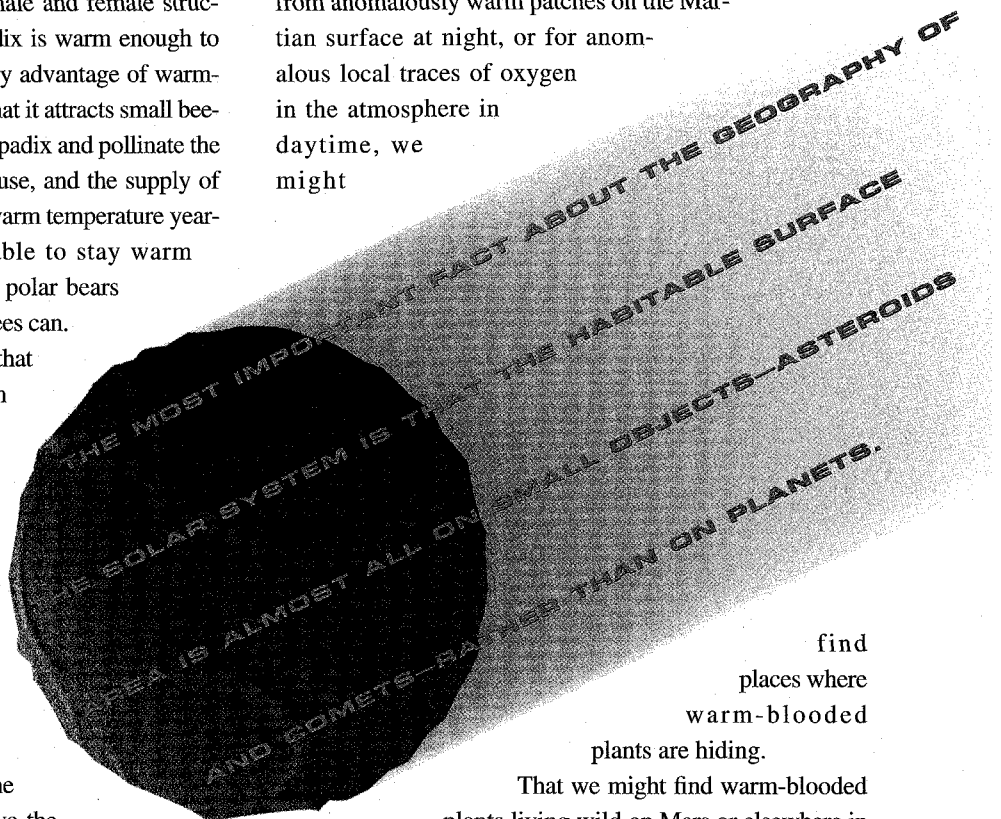
tent. For about two weeks the skunk cabbage maintains a warm temperature by rapidly metabolizing starch stored inside the part of its anatomy known as the spadix, which contains the hidden flowers with their male and female structures. According to folklore, the spadix is warm enough to melt snow around it. The evolutionary advantage of warm-bloodedness to the plant is probably that it attracts small beetles or other insects that linger in the spadix and pollinate the flowers. The spadix is not a greenhouse, and the supply of starch is not sufficient to maintain a warm temperature year-round. No terrestrial plants are able to stay warm through an Arctic winter. On Earth polar bears can flourish in colder climates than trees can.

It seems to be an accident of history that warm-blooded animals evolved on Earth to colonize cold climates, whereas warm-blooded plants did not. On Mars plants might have been pushed to yet more drastic adaptations.

Plants could grow greenhouses (so far the idea remains a theory) just as turtles grow shells and polar bears grow fur and polyps build coral reefs in tropical seas. These plants could keep warm by the light from a distant Sun and conserve the oxygen that they produce by photosynthesis. The greenhouse would consist of a thick skin providing thermal insulation, with small transparent windows to admit sunlight. Outside the skin would be an array of simple lenses, focusing sunlight through the windows into the interior. The windows would have to be small, to limit the loss of heat from outward radiation. The plant would also need deep roots, to tap water and nutrients from warmer layers underground. Inside the greenhouse the plant could grow leaves and flowers in an oxygen-containing habitat where aerobic microbes and animals might also live. Groups of greenhouses could grow together to form extended habitats for other species of plants and animals. An attendant community of microbes and fungi might help the plants to extract nutrients from the local ice or soil. Pores in the outer skin of the greenhouse might open to admit carbon dioxide from the atmosphere outside, with miniature airlocks and cold traps to keep losses of oxygen and water to a minimum.

If warm-blooded plants exist on Mars, they may or may not be easy to see. We cannot predict whether they would stand out from their surroundings in a visual or photographic survey. Two clues to their presence would almost certain-

ly be detectable: leakage of heat and leakage of oxygen. Neither thermal insulation nor atmospheric containment is likely to be perfect. If we looked for heat radiation from anomalously warm patches on the Martian surface at night, or for anomalous local traces of oxygen in the atmosphere in daytime, we might



find places where warm-blooded plants are hiding.

That we might find warm-blooded plants living wild on Mars or elsewhere in the solar system, it must be admitted, is only a remote possibility. It is much more likely that we will find Mars to be sterile, or inhabited only by subterranean microbes. In that case warm-blooded plants could be important in a different way—as a tool for human settlement. I now leave the subject of science to talk about human space travel and colonization. Human colonization of the solar system would not be primarily a scientific enterprise; it would be driven by motivations that go far beyond science.

Confusion of Aims

THE space-shuttle program was in trouble even before the *Challenger* accident, because it was based on a confusion of aims. It was trying both to open the way to human adventure in space and to serve as a practical launch system for scientific, commercial, and military missions. As I saw when I climbed into the shuttle at Houston, the two aims were never compatible. The shuttle was the result of a

political compromise between people who wanted a reliable freight service into space and people who wanted to keep alive the tradition of the manned *Apollo* missions to the Moon. No single vehicle could do both jobs well. The shuttle tried, but it was too expensive for the first and too limited in its performance for the second.

In the future the two aims of the space program will be pursued separately. The twenty years since the birth of the shuttle have seen spectacular progress in the technologies of data processing, remote sensing, and autonomous navigation. With these technologies almost all the practical needs of science, commerce, and national security are now better served by unmanned missions than by the shuttle.

The future

zens will consider reasonable. The *Apollo* missions, tied to a ten-year time frame, gave a false start to human exploration. They were far too costly to be sustained, and at the end of the ten-year program they had reached a dead end. If it had been made clear from the beginning that manned exploration would be a hundred-year program—one with a stable and affordable budget—we might by now have a light two-passenger spacecraft instead of the shuttle. We might already have a few people learning how to live permanently on the Moon, using only local resources.

We are now at the beginning of a revolution in space technology, when for the first time cheapness will be mandatory. Missions that are not cheap will not fly. This is bad news for space explorers in the short run and good news in the long run. Finally cheapness has a chance. Missions to the planets have been few and far between in the past ten years because they became inordinately expensive; they were expensive because of an imbalance in funding between ground-based and space-based science. For thirty years it was easier politically to obtain ten dollars for a

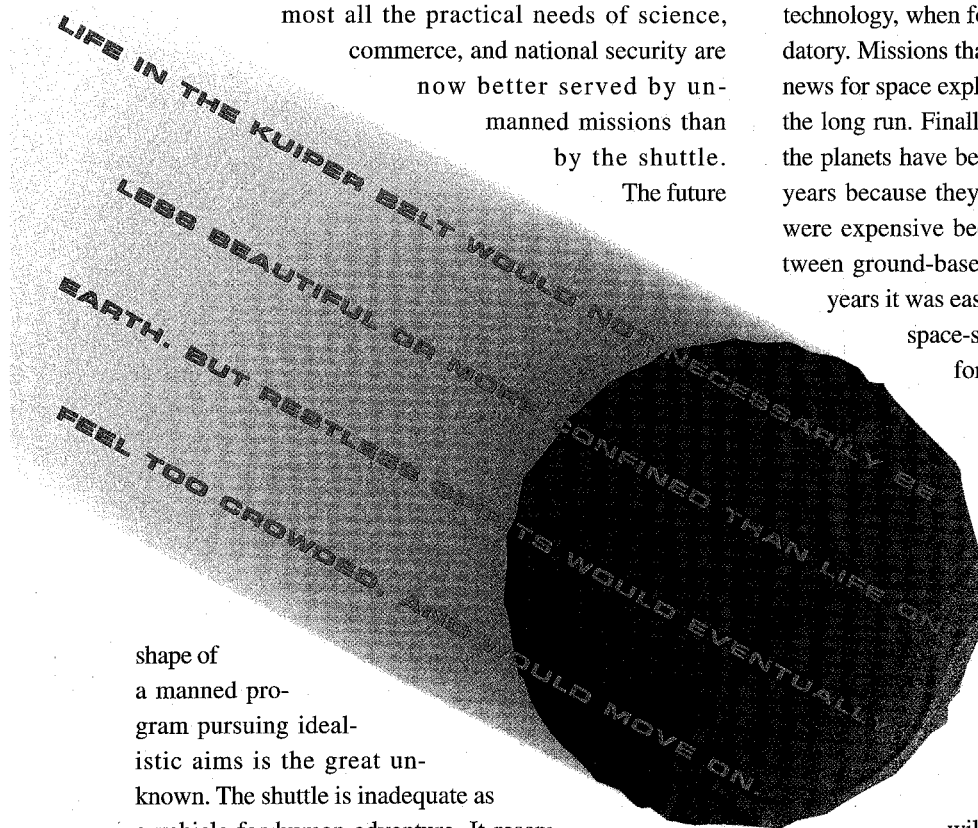
space-science mission than to obtain one dollar for astronomy on the ground. The unfair competition injured both parties, starving ground-based astronomy and spoiling space science. The injury to space science was greater: ground-based astronomy flourished in spite of starvation, while planetary missions almost came to a halt in spite of big budgets. The rules are now changing, in the direction of fair competition between ground and space. This means that in the future space missions will be cheap. Once the barrier of high cost is broken, missions will be more frequent and

the pace of discovery will be faster.

The essential first step in making either unmanned or manned operations cheap is to eliminate the standing army of people at Mission Control who take care of communication with spacecraft day after day. Spacecraft and the instruments they carry must become completely autonomous. The second step is to develop new technologies for launching payloads into space cheaply. The current Mars missions are making only small steps toward these goals. The coming era of cheap space operations will begin with unmanned missions, which will exercise the new technologies of propulsion and operation. Cheap manned missions will come later. Cheap unmanned missions require only new en-

shape of a manned program pursuing idealistic aims is the great unknown. The shuttle is inadequate as a vehicle for human adventure. It resembles a Greyhound bus rather than a Land Rover. Another spending spree like the one for *Apollo* would be inadequate, even if it were politically possible. Does the manned space program have a future?

The confusion of aims afflicting the space program from the beginning was in essence a confusion of time frames. The practical aims of scientific and military activities in space made sense in a time frame of ten years; the basic technology for unmanned space missions took only ten years to develop. The aim of opening the skies to human exploration and adventure makes sense in a time frame of a hundred years—what it will probably take to develop the technologies needed for significant numbers of human explorers to roam space at a price that earthbound citi-





gineering; cheap manned missions will require new biotechnology. The chief problem for a manned mission is not getting there but learning how to survive after arrival. Surviving and making a home away from Earth are problems of biology rather than of engineering.

No law of physics or biology forbids cheap travel and settlement all over the solar system and beyond. But it is impossible to predict how long this will take. Predictions of the dates of future achievements are notoriously fallible. My guess is that the era of cheap unmanned missions will be the next fifty years, and the era of cheap manned missions will start sometime late in the twenty-first century. The time these things will take depends on unforeseeable accidents of history and politics. My date for the beginning of cheap manned exploration and settlement is based on a historical analogy: from Columbus's first voyage across the Atlantic to the settlement of the Pilgrims in Massachusetts was 128 years. So I am guessing that in 2085, 128 years after the launch of the first *Sputnik*, the private settlement of pilgrims all over the solar system will begin.

Learning to Live in the Universe

THE main lesson I draw from the history of space activity in this century is that we must clearly separate short-term from long-term aims. The dream of expanding the domain of life from Earth into the universe makes sense only as a long-term goal. Any affordable program of manned exploration must be centered in biology, and its time frame tied to the time frame of biotechnology; a hundred years, roughly the time it will take us to learn to grow warm-blooded plants, is probably reasonable. The people who decide to go to Mars or Europa will know whether or not indigenous life exists there. If it does exist, they will know how to nurture and protect it when they come to build their own habitats. If it does not, they will bring new life to make good nature's lack.

The most important part of their baggage will be the seeds of plants and animals genetically engineered to survive in an alien climate. On a world that has only a thin atmosphere, like Mars, or no atmosphere at all, like Europa, the most useful seeds will be the seeds of warm-blooded plants. After a hundred years of development of genetic engineering, we will know how to write the DNA to make plants grow greenhouses. Plants as large as trees could grow greenhouses big enough for human beings to live in. If the human settlers

are wise, they will arrive to move into homes already prepared for them by an ecology of warm-blooded plants and animals introduced by earlier, unmanned missions.

Warm-blooded plants will not by themselves solve all our problems. The essential requirement for a successful human colony will be a deep understanding of the local ecology, so that human beings can become a part of it without destroying it. The Biosphere 2 experiment in Arizona, in which eight people tried unsuccessfully to live in a closed ecology for two years, was not a failure but a valuable object lesson. It taught us how human beings without sufficient understanding of their habitat could unexpectedly run out of oxygen.

Why should anybody wish to live on Mars or Europa? The only answer we can give to this question is the answer that George Mallory gave to the question why he wanted to climb Mount Everest: "Because it is there." There may be economic, scientific, or sentimental reasons attracting people to remote places; people always have a variety of reasons for moving from one place to another. One of the few constant factors in human history is migration, often over huge distances for reasons that are difficult to discern. I have little doubt that as soon as emigration from Earth becomes cheap enough for ordinary people to afford, people will emigrate. To make human space travel cheap, we will need advanced biotechnology in addition to advanced propulsion systems. And we will need a large number of travelers, to bring down the cost of a ticket. These are the reasons human space travel will not be cheap until fifty or a hundred years have gone by.

The most important fact about the geography of the solar system is that the habitable surface area is almost all on small objects—asteroids and comets—rather than on planets. Planets have most of the mass but very little of the surface area. Asteroids are usually rock, and orbit in the inner part of the solar system, inside the orbit of Jupiter. Comets are usually ice, and orbit in the outer part of the solar system, farther from the Sun than Neptune. Comets of average size are visible from Earth only on the rare occasions when gravitational perturbations cause them to fall close to the Sun and their volatile surfaces boil off to form bright tails in the sky.

Comets are more significant than asteroids in the ecology of the solar system, and a huge swarm of them can be found in a ring-shaped region called the Kuiper Belt, outside the orbit of Neptune. Only in the past few years have some of the largest Kuiper Belt objects been seen, first with ground telescopes in Hawaii and more recently with the Hubble Space Telescope. According to my rough estimate, the total surface area of the trillions of objects in the Kuiper Belt is about a thousand times the area of Earth.

Why are comets of greater ecological interest than asteroids? First, they are vastly more numerous. Second, ice is better than rock as a basis for life, and comets contain not only ice but also most of the other chemical elements that are essential for biology. Third, the orbital speeds of comets are much slower than the speeds of asteroids. The Kuiper Belt may seem to us today to be a cold and inhospitable place, but it is probably less inhospitable to life than Mars. It has the advantage of being an archipelago—a collection of small, habitable islands not too far apart from one another. Because their relative speeds are slow, communication and travel between islands would be easy. If you were living on a mile-wide comet in the Kuiper Belt, another mile-wide object would pass by within a million miles about once a month, on average. Objects a hundred yards wide would pass by within this distance every day. It would take only a few days, using a small spacecraft with a modest propulsion system, to hop over and visit neighbors or replenish supplies. If you were bored by the scenery or unhappy with your family, you could move permanently and try your luck on another comet, just as colonists moved to Providence and places west.

If a community occupying a Kuiper Belt object outgrew its habitat and wished to expand, it could increase its living space by attaching tethers to neighboring objects as they floated by. A metropolis could grow in the twenty-second century by the accretion of objects as rapidly as Chicago or San Francisco grew in the nineteenth by the accretion of real estate. A Kuiper Belt metropolis would probably be a flat, disk-shaped collection of cometary objects, linked by long tethers and revolving slowly around the center to keep the tethers taut. To continue the accretion of desirable properties while avoiding destructive impacts, a metropolitan border patrol would engage in an interesting game of celestial billiards, tracking approaching objects with telescopes, nudging them gently with space tugs, and hooking them with tethers.

Recently the inhabitants of Earth have become aware that our planet is exposed to occasional impacts of asteroids and comets that may cause worldwide devastation. The most famous such impact occurred 65 million years ago, in Mexico, and may have been responsible for the demise of the dinosaurs. During the next hundred years, as the technologies of astronomical surveillance and space propulsion move forward, it is likely that active intervention to protect Earth from future impacts will become feasible. We may see a mutually profitable merger of the space-science enterprise with the business of planet protection. The cost of protection would be modest, provided that the warning time before an impact was as long as a hundred years. To deflect an orbiting object enough to cause it to miss Earth, a slow, steady push

applied by a solar-powered engine would be much more effective than a nuclear explosion. With a hundred-year warning time the power required for the steady push would be only about two kilowatts for an average-size comet, with a mass of a billion tons. Two kilowatts is power on a human, not an astronomical, scale. Even as far from the Sun as the Kuiper Belt there is enough power in sunlight to supply two kilowatts with a solar collector of reasonable size. Once human communities were established in the Kuiper Belt, their border patrol would be in a position to offer its services to Earth, to detect objects that threatened to collide with Earth and deflect them in timely fashion at minimal cost.

Another service that Kuiper Belt communities might provide for human beings on Earth is scientific exploration. The belt contains enough unknown objects to keep explorers busy for thousands of years. The comets are cold and ancient enough to preserve detailed records of the formation and early history of the solar system. It is likely that we would find objects there that are older than the Sun. It should be possible to trace the history of our system back into the pre-solar era.

It could well happen that within a few hundred years most of the inhabitants of the solar system will be living in the Kuiper Belt. Accustomed as we are to living on a high-gravity planet close to the Sun, it is difficult for us to imagine what it would be like to live with low gravity far away. One of the first steps a human colony would take to establish itself in the Kuiper Belt would be to surround its cometary habitat with an extended efflorescence of mirrors in space to collect sunlight. An array of mirrors sixty miles in diameter could collect a steady thousand megawatts of energy anywhere in the Kuiper Belt, out to three times the distance of Neptune from the Sun. That is enough energy to sustain a considerable population of plants, animals, and human beings with all modern conveniences. The mirrors would not have to be optically perfect. The material out of which to construct them, a few thousand tons of metal or plastic, would probably be available on any Kuiper Belt object. After a century of progress in biotechnology we would not need to manufacture the mirrors. We would teach our plants to grow them.

Life in the Kuiper Belt would be different from life on Earth, but not necessarily less beautiful or more confined. After a century or two there would be metropolitan centers, cultural monuments, urban sprawl—all the glories and discontents of a high civilization. Soon restless spirits would find the Kuiper Belt too crowded. But there would be an open frontier and a vast wilderness beyond. Beyond the Kuiper Belt lies a more extended swarm of comets—the Oort Cloud, farther away from the Sun and still untamed. ☼

Typewriter Man

by IAN FRAZIER

The need for a new letter on an old manual machine leads the author to the shop of Martin Tytell, now in his seventh decade as repairman, historian, and high priest of typewriters

I WRITE on a manual typewriter, but don't bug me about it, okay? I know that recently certain machines have been developed that produce manuscripts more efficiently than a manual typewriter ever could. When these machines began to take over, people constantly asked if I used one; for a while that was the fact about me people seemed most interested to know. When I replied that I didn't, people usually became vexed, or in some cases nearly enraged. The arguments that followed were of a pattern. Those in favor of the new machines described their many advantages, never failing to include the ease with which the new machines could move paragraphs around. I defended myself with explanations that started out mild and reasonable and quickly descended to a whiny "I just don't like them!" None of this got anybody anywhere. Then one day a champion of the new machines pinned me down on the subject, extolling them, as usual, and finally confronting me with the inevitable question: Did I use one? My panic began to mount as I saw what lay ahead—the arguments, the rebuttals, the recriminations. I took a deep breath. "No . . . I mean, yes!" I replied. Satisfied, the prosecutor moved on to other topics, as my heart rate returned to normal.

Then suddenly that question was not around anymore. No one has asked me it in years. I guess the victory of the new



machines has been so complete that there's no longer a need to hunt down resisters. Why bother? Time will take care of us. Meanwhile, I continued to write on the same Olympia portable manual I had bought with my first paycheck from *Oui* magazine, in Chicago in 1973. I liked it so much that when I got a

little money I bought other Olympia manuals, fancier models, but all of them used, of course. They are perhaps not the best manual typewriters ever made—experts often give that distinction to Underwoods or Hermes—but they suit me, and I've stuck by them. The hell of it is, though, that after about twenty years they start to break. One afternoon in 1994 the *e* key on my favorite Olympia stopped working. *E* is not a rarity, like @ or %, that you can mostly do without. I was living in Brooklyn at the time. I called around and found a guy there who claimed to be able to fix anything, typewriters included. When he returned the typewriter to me, all the keys were at different heights, like notes in a lilting tune, and the *e* bar hit the ribbon hard enough to make a mark only if you helped it with your finger.

The Manhattan Yellow Pages has so many listings under "Typewriters" that you might think getting someone to fix a manual would not be hard. The repair places I called were agreeable enough at first; but as I described the problem (*Fixing an e, for Pete's sake! How tough can that be?*), they

began to hedge and temporize. They mentioned a scarcity of spare parts, and the difficulty of welding forged steel, and other problems, all apparently my own fault for not having foreseen. I took my typewriter various places to have it looked at, and brought it home again unrepaired. This went on for a while. Finally, approaching the end of the Yellow Pages listing, I found an entry for "TYTELL TYPWRTR CO." It advertised restorations of antiques, an on-premises machine shop, a huge inventory of manuals, and sixty-five years of experience and accumulated parts. The address was in lower Manhattan. I called the number, and a voice answered, "Martin Tytell." I told Mr. Tytell my problem, and he told me he certainly could fix it. I said I would bring the typewriter in next week. "You should bring it in as soon as possible," he advised. "I'm an old man."

I got on the subway to Fulton Street right away and carried my typewriter up the stairs to his second-floor shop at 116 Fulton. I saw that he was indeed an old man, standing on a teetering stepladder and moving a heavy typewriter onto a high shelf while a woman's voice offstage told him to be careful and reminded him of his recent heart surgery. He climbed down and shook my hand. He was wearing a clean white lab coat over a light-blue shirt and a dark-blue bow tie. His head was almost bald on top and fringed with white professor-style side hairs that matched the white of his small moustache. His blue eyes were slitted and wary and humorous, and all his features had a sharpness produced by a lifetime of focusing concentration down to pica size. He examined the typewriter and gave me a claim check and told me I could pick it up in a few days. His shop fixed the *e* and completely overhauled the machine and got it running better than it ever had.

I ended up going back to see Mr. Tytell many times. I moved from New York to a distant part of the country, but when I returned for visits I brought typewriters for him to repair. I met his wife, Pearl, and their son, Peter, who's fifty-two. Both Pearl and Peter are handwriting and document experts who often testify in court cases where written evidence is involved. Mr. and Mrs. Tytell have been married for fifty-four years. Pearl Tytell is handsome and petite, with unwavering blue eyes and long silver-blond hair, which she wears in a braid wrapped carefully on the top of her head. For clothes she favors suits in subdued colors or pleated skirts in dark plaid, and neat white blouses with a cameo brooch at the throat. She looks like someone you would believe on the witness stand. Her habit of accuracy provides running footnotes to the autobiography her husband likes to tell. The shop is mostly floor-to-ceiling shelves of typewriters in cases or wrapped in plastic sheets, boxes of typewriter parts past numbering, and disassembled typewriters on benches, all in a labyrinthine layout beneath fluorescent lights. Mr. Tytell works in one part of the shop and his wife in another, invisible but nearby among the shelves.

WHEN my father was a communications officer on aircraft carriers in the Second World War, he sent his family letters typewritten on flyweight airmail stationery. He single-spaced and made almost no mistakes. To his younger brother in the hospital he described everything about the ship *Boxer*—the war had ended by then, and censorship had eased—that caught his eye, from the shadow of the bridge moving through the clear depths to the formations of the fighter planes above. His ship was the flagship of a convoy, and so carried both a captain and an admiral. He described how the one would send the other a message via the communications room, to be typed up in many copies and passed along in a procedure that took a long time, especially considering that the two men were at command posts separated by just a flight of stairs. He brought home sheaves of Navy documents in his sea chest. Many were stamped TOP SECRET in red ink and had holes punched in them and signatures affixed. They had to do with maneuvers and requests obscure to me, and the capture of a German submarine. They were on paper so light you could almost see through it, and their carbon-copy typescript was fuzzy and thick.

My father used a stand-up Royal typewriter, green with a tortoiseshell finish, and its type was small and clear. I remember him sitting with his hands poised over it, little fingers out to the sides, typing what I now know was a description of one of his patents or a letter of complaint to the Ford Motor Company. If one of my sisters or brothers or I lost a baby tooth, we always put it in an envelope under our pillow. When we woke in the morning, the tooth would have been replaced by a dollar bill and a letter from the tooth fairy. Generally these letters discussed some bureaucratic problem the tooth fairy was having with his lost-tooth filing system or with a secretary who had recently gotten pregnant and quit. The letters were neatly typed in the same clear print as on my father's Royal. He did not like me to fool with the typewriter, but I tried to use it when I barely knew how to write by hand. It always surprised me what a bad job I did and what a mess I made. Somehow I always had to get my fingers into the works, tangling the typewriter ribbon and smearing ink and detaching the spool. Like the sound of a typewriter bell, that smell of an inked silk typewriter ribbon, a smell combining sootiness with a medicinal volatility, has almost vanished today.

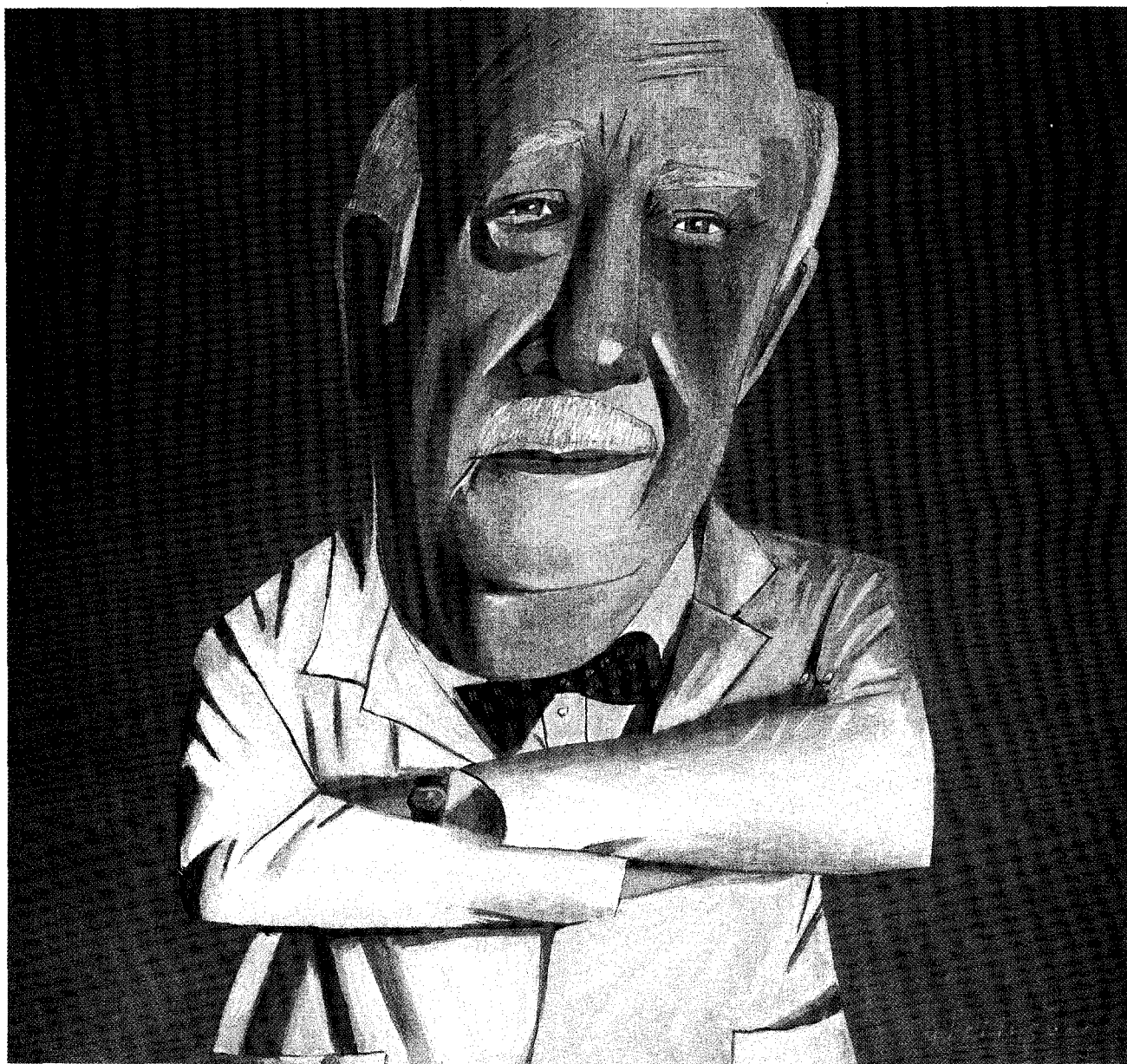
In Mr. Tytell's shop, of course, it is in good supply. I can't say that when I breathe it there, impressions of the past come to me in a conscious or orderly way. It's deeper than that—as if I had opened my father's sea chest again and stuck my head into its stored-up aura of 1940s wartime. Mr. Tytell understands that his trade involves more than just some possibly out-of-date office machines. "We don't get normal people here," he says with a certain pride. Coincidentally or not, the second time I saw him he made a point of showing me a small typewriter in a steel case as smooth

and silvery as a gun mount on an airplane wing. He told me it was an uncrushable typewriter case designed during the Second World War to survive being run over by a tank. Then he began to tell me his experiences working on typewriters for the government during the war.

The Second World War was a manual-typewriter war. One would be tempted to say that never will typewriters be nearly so important in a war again, were it not for the many

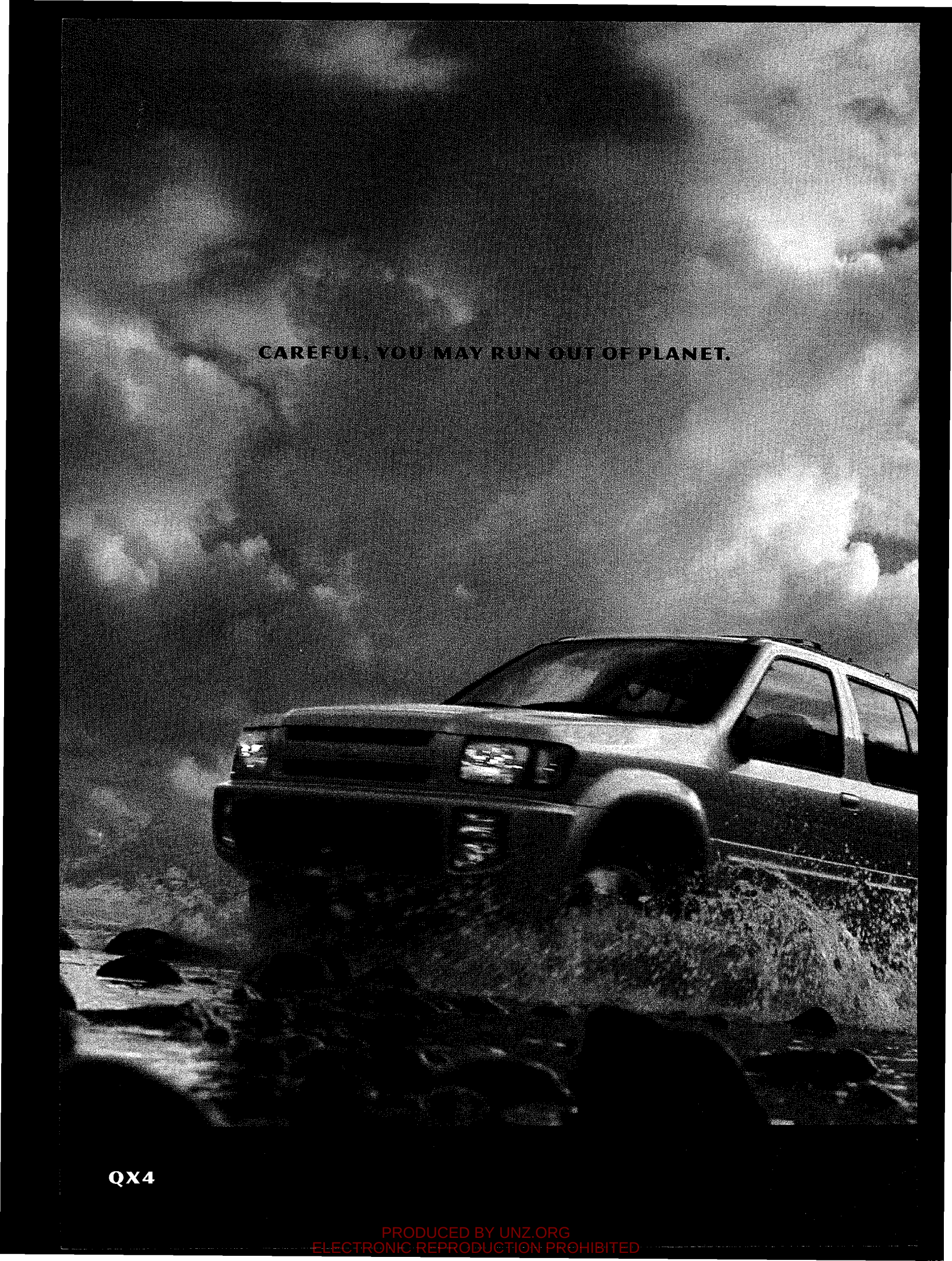
ing the D-Day invasion was a cargo ship carrying 20,000 Royal and Underwood typewriters intended for the use of the Allies. Mr. Tytell says that as far as he knows, all 20,000 are still down there. More than other veterans, a man whose life has been typewriters is likely to divide his history into short summaries covering before the war and after the war, and volumes in between.

Martin Tytell was born to Russian Jewish parents in New



manual typewriters in the Serbian and Croatian alphabets that Mr. Tytell has sold for use in Bosnia in recent years. Armies in the Second World War took typewriters with them into battle and typed with them in the field on little tripod stands. In the United States typewriters were classified as wartime materiel, under the control of the War Production Board and unavailable for purchase by civilians without special authorization. Among the ships sunk off Normandy dur-

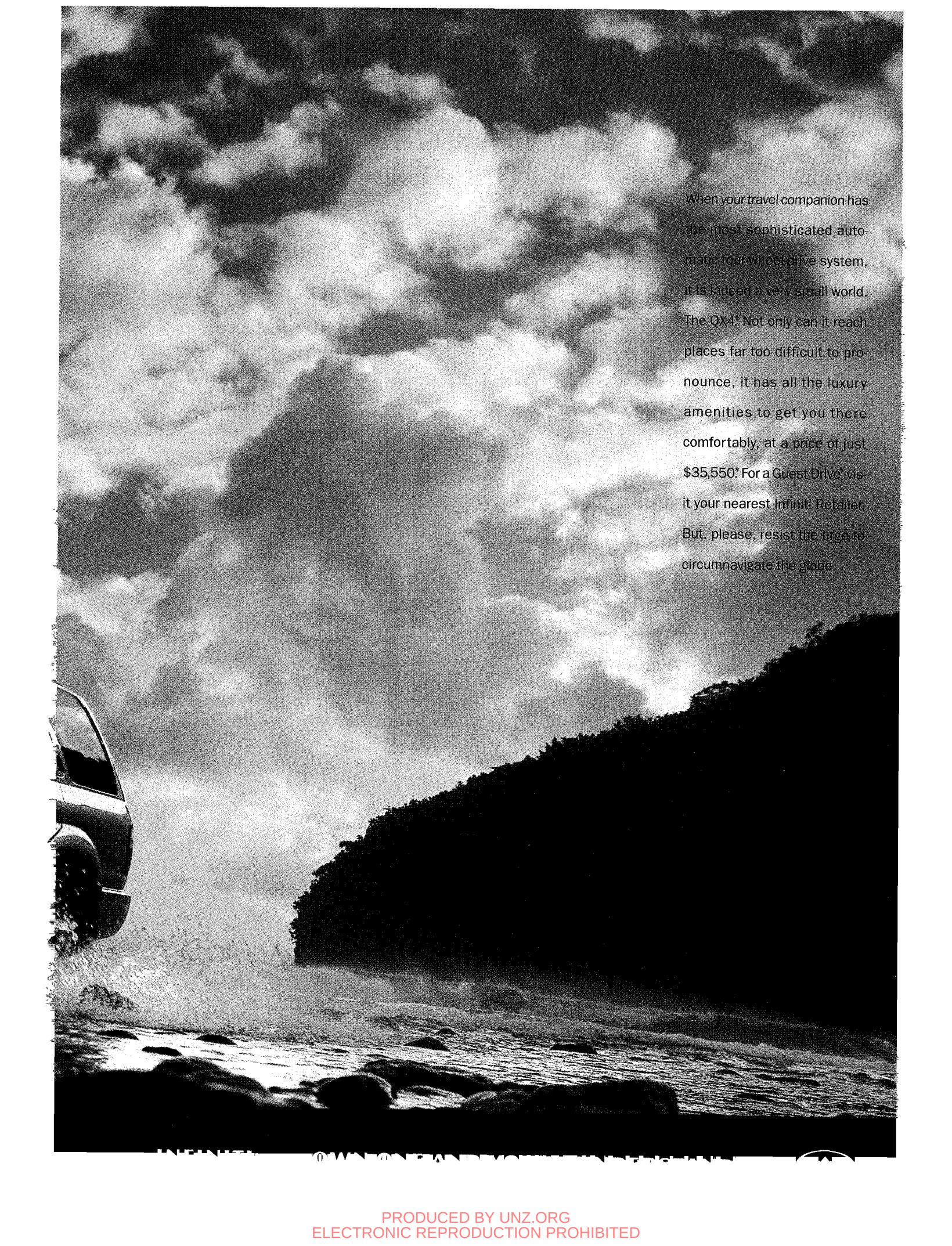
York in 1913, and he grew up on Rutgers Street, on the Lower East Side. He was the ninth of ten children, seven of whom survived. His father had come to America from Argentina, where he manufactured wheels for the Argentine government. In New York he worked as a machinist. Martin always loved tools and screws, and he began working in a hardware store when he was still a boy. He carried a screwdriver wherever he went. One day in gym class at Thomas Jefferson



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High School the assignment was rope climbing, which Martin thought was for monkeys, so he got the teacher to let him spend the period in a nearby office answering the phone. The office had an Underwood No. 5 typewriter, which Martin began to examine and take apart. That kind of Underwood was designed so that just a single screw disconnected the carriage, to allow for basic cleaning and maintenance without disturbing the rest of the machine. The screw was hard to put back in, however, so Martin

had to leave the typewriter in pieces. This happened several times. Finally the repairman who came to fix the Underwood went looking for the kid who was taking it apart. He ended up offering to teach Martin how to work on Underwoods at his apartment in Canarsie. Martin went there for six Sundays in a row. Soon he could take an Underwood apart and put it together blindfolded, a trick that won him the account for maintenance of all the typewriters at Columbia-Presbyterian hospital when he went there one day cold-canvassing for a job. Before he was out of high school, he had several other accounts to maintain typewriters around the city, and his own office at 206 Broadway.

The records of his present business go back to 1935. By then he had moved to an office at 87 Nassau Street, which he left a few years later for 123 Fulton Street, which he left in 1964 for where he is now. As well as fixing typewriters, he had them for rent and sold them new and used. Pearl came to work for him in 1938. At about that time he added a new service to his business—converting American-made typewriters to foreign alphabets for the stationery department at Macy's department store. He did these jobs on short notice and fast. Macy's would tell a customer that they could provide a typewriter in the customer's language before he left town; then Martin would remove the type from an American typewriter, solder on new type for the alphabet desired, and put new lettering on the keyboard. Usually he converted to Spanish or French, not difficult jobs, but he did Russian, Greek, and German, too. He found that by adding an idle gear he bought for forty-five cents on Canal Street, he could make a typewriter go from right to left. That enabled him to do Arabic and other right-left languages such as Hebrew and Farsi.

Nights he took courses in business administration at St. John's University. When a recruiter came and made a pitch about the Marine Corps to the students there, Martin decided to join the Marine Corps Reserves, hoping to go on to flight

I told Mr. Tytell my problem, and he told me he certainly could fix it. I said I would bring the typewriter in next week. "You should bring it in as soon as possible," he advised. "I'm an old man."

school and become a Navy pilot. He did his basic training at Quantico and then served part-time at bases in the New York area. On his own he took flying lessons at an airfield on Staten Island. Pearl took lessons too; they courted while learning to fly. Pearl briefly considered becoming a ferry pilot for the military. Martin earned high marks on the entrance tests for flight school, but in the end didn't get in. The official reason was his flat feet. He thinks he would have made a good pilot, and that the real

reason was cultural—that the Navy preferred WASPY Ivy League types. The officer who signed his honorable-discharge papers in November of 1940 told him privately that "night-college guys" like him generally did not do well in flight school.

Factories that make typewriters use the same equipment and methods as factories that make guns. By the time the United States had entered the war, most American typewriter manufacturers had changed over to the production of things like bombsights and rifle barrels. Much as the war needed typewriters, it needed guns more. The lack of new typewriters sent the War Department scrambling for whatever machines it could find, in whatever shape; this led naturally to the shop of Martin Tytell. His sales business was nonexistent and his income from rentals slim, and he began to do more and more work for the government, fixing up used machines. In 1943 the War Department got a windfall of Remington typewriters designed originally to be sold in Siam. By then Martin was back in the service, in the Army this time, so Pearl (by then Mrs. Tytell) went down to the Pentagon and examined the machines and saw that they could be converted from Siamese to what the military required. An official of the War Production Board who had been an executive for a big typewriter wholesaler in the Midwest got Martin transferred from Fort Jay, on Governors Island, to a detached-duty unit called the Enlisted Reserve Corps for ninety days' service. Martin did the work on the Remingtons in his shop on Fulton Street while spending his nights at home.

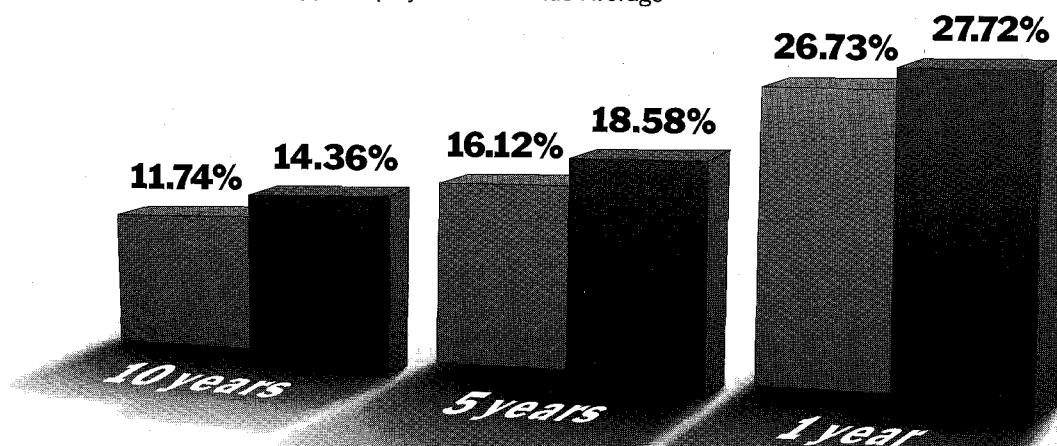
From the kinds of typewriter jobs he was asked to do, and especially from the alphabets involved, Martin could make good guesses about upcoming strategy in the war. He predicted to the day the landing at Normandy. For a private first class, he saw the war effort on an unusually big screen, as he kept the typewriters working at Fort Jay and at the Manhattan offices of *Yank* magazine and at recruiting stations in the city

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and upstate. He spent much of his time assigned to the Army's Morale Services Division, at 165 Broadway, which dealt in information and propaganda. There he received his hardest job of the war—a rush request to convert typewriters to twenty-one different languages of Asia and the South Pacific. Many of the languages he had never heard of before. The War Department wanted to provide airmen, in case they were shot down, with survival kits that included messages on silk in the languages of people they were likely to meet on the ground. Morale Services found native speakers and scholars to help with the languages. Martin obtained the type and did the soldering and the keyboards. The implications of the work and its difficulty brought him to near collapse, but he completed it with only one mistake: on the Burmese typewriter he put a letter on upside down. Years later, after he had discovered his error, he told the language professor he had worked with that he would fix that letter on the professor's Burmese typewriter. The professor said not to bother; in the intervening years, as a result of typewriters copied from Martin's original, that upside-down letter had been accepted in Burma as proper typewriter style.

When Martin received his honorable discharge, in November of 1945, the colonel of his unit gave him a testimonial dinner and a typewriter ribbon done up in the style of a military decoration. Being a civilian made little change in what Martin did every day. He still worked on typewriters

for the government, and since manufacture had not yet resumed, he scared up serviceable used ones just as before. For a while he was running an assembly line by car, carrying parts in his trunk to mechanics all over New York who had worked in typewriter factories and knew certain steps of the process. He hired more assistants at his shop, including some displaced persons recently arrived from Europe. One of them had escaped from a concentration camp and hidden in the house of a farmer; he worked for Martin for years and sent the farmer a package of food and clothes every month for as long as Martin knew him. Another had learned typewriter repair in Germany before the war, a skill that kept him alive at Auschwitz, where he was given the job of converting to German a large number of Russian typewriters looted by the Germans along the Eastern Front. After the Soviet Army liberated the camp, the Russians had him convert the typewriters back to Russian again.

THE history of the typewriter from its invention to the present is complicated, but not that complicated. Where you can get lost is in discussions about who made the first writing machine—there are a lot of candidates, in Europe and in the early United States—and in lists of the many typewriters patented and manufactured in the years after the machines caught on. It's easier to say who made the first typewriter that led eventually to commercial success: in

NO ESCAPE

No, not yet, move nothing until
you have filled yourself with
intention, or

your act will freeze, immutable, and
your thought will have aborted
into misshapen stumbling.

We stammer in the effort to speak, lurch
out of a passion to walk, slump
in lieu of sitting; yet,

within, awareness reaches toward
an attainable state in which
we seek to direct our selves

as a rider guides the most accomplished of
horses, crupper gathering, hooves
pattering, neck yearning toward

heaven, and the supple trunk
conveys itself over the earth without
anticipation or effort.

This is the ascent into the self,
encountering possibility just as it
flowers into the actual.

We attain fulfillment only if we carry
the breath of the world
without surrender
or escape.

—PETER DAVISON

1873 E. Remington & Sons, gunmakers of Ilion, New York, began production of an up-strike typewriter with a four-bank keyboard based on a machine developed a few years before by the Wisconsin inventors Carlos Glidden and Christopher Latham Sholes. The company made 550 typewriters the first year; Mark Twain bought one. People said the typewriter would never replace the pen, but in offices it soon did. Its popularity gave women a way to enter the work force in large numbers for the first time. For a while their name, "type writers," was the same as the machines'. The typewriter gets some credit for contributing to the movement for women's suffrage and emancipation at the turn of the century. By that time more than thirty companies were making typewriters in the United States, and the typewriter bell had become a commonplace business sound. Remington & Sons sold its typewriter division in 1886, but its name appeared on manual typewriters for almost a hundred years.

The Remington and other early machines were sometimes called "blind writers," because the paper disappeared down into the works and the type struck the paper where it couldn't be seen. A German-born inventor named Franz Xavier Wagner thought that an upright machine whose type hit the paper in sight would be a better idea. He invented one and took his "visible writer" to Remington, but the company wasn't interested. Wagner founded a company and began making the machines himself in the mid-1890s. Their obvious superiority to the blind writers won the market in a few years, and every typewriter company began to make variations on Wagner's design. With that the basic technology of the manual typewriter was in place, and would remain unchanged. The company Wagner founded soon became the Underwood Typewriter Company, of New York and Connecticut. America produced many other fine makes of typewriter—Royal, Hammond, Corona—but the Underwood would remain the industry standard for the rest of the manual typewriter's reign.

By the 1920s about half of all typewriters sold in the world were Underwoods. Typewriter technology moved on to refinements, with machines that were quieter or lighter or easier on the fingertips. Oddly, no typewriter manufacturer succeeded in improving on one of the most inefficient features of the original machines—the arrangement of the keyboard. Almost all typewriters used the Universal keyboard, also called the QWERTY keyboard, which dated from the experimental machines of Glidden and Sholes. Remington had copied its keyboard from their model, and other manufacturers copied Remington. Today no one can say for sure why Glidden and Sholes arranged the keys that way. Their three-tier layout of letters, with an apparently random selection on the top line, a quasi-alphabetical-order segment as part of the middle line, and more randomness on the bottom, resists persuasive explanation. As the machinery improved and typing speeds increased, the awkwardness of the keyboard be-

came plain. An industry conference met in 1905 and considered ideas for better keyboards, without result. In 1932 a professor at the University of Washington named August Dvorak introduced a statistics-based keyboard arrangement that he said improved typing speed over the Universal by 35 percent. He spent decades trying to get his keyboard accepted, but finally concluded that it would be as easy to change the Golden Rule. There just never was a moment when enough people who knew how to type were willing to learn all over again. The QWERTY layout survived on manual typewriters, and slid effortlessly onto electric typewriters and beyond. Today, no matter what kind of machine you write on, the QWERTY, a "primitive tortureboard" according to Dvorak, is probably the keyboard you use.

As a maker of manual typewriters, America declined after the Second World War. Production never returned to what it had been; from being the world's largest exporter of typewriters, the United States became the largest importer. The postwar years brought the rise of typewriter companies in countries where peaceful manufacturing was encouraged while we continued to make guns—Nippon in Japan, Olympia in West Germany, and Olivetti in Italy. Olympia and Olivetti quickly grew to multinational giants. Olympia built typewriter factories in Yugoslavia, Canada, Mexico, and Chile. Olivetti, which had been making typewriters since 1911, expanded into England and the United States. In 1959 it bought Underwood, and eventually phased out that famous name. By the mid-1960s manual typewriters had begun to disappear owing to the success of the electric typewriter, an invention that would have its own saga of rise and decline. No one has made manual typewriters in America for decades. The European companies have mostly discontinued their manual lines and moved into various electronic machines. For someone interested in buying a brand-new manual typewriter, a hundred-plus years of typewriter history comes down to this: Olympia still makes a small portable, Olivetti makes two portables and a heavier office machine, and the largest manufacturer of English-language manual typewriters in the world seems to be the Godrej & Boyce Manufacturing Company of India, located on the outskirts of Bombay.

MR. Tytell goes to his shop two or three days a week, depending on how he's feeling. Customers who want to see him call his answering machine, and he calls back and sets up appointments. A sign on the wall that says

PSYCHOANALYSIS FOR YOUR TYPEWRITER
WHETHER IT'S FRUSTRATED, INHIBITED, SCHIZOID
OR WHAT HAVE YOU

contributes to the doctor-patient quality of the visits. Plus he's wearing a white lab coat and you're not. Some customers arrive in limousines, which wait nearby until the sessions are through. Mr. Tytell has fixed typewriters for such people as

Perle Mesta and the Archbishop of Lebanon and Charles Kuralt. Some customers climb sweating from the subway station and stop for a moment in the daylight of Fulton Street to switch the case containing the heavy machine from one hand to the other. Because of a mishap involving a romance novelist, a treasured typewriter, and the wreck of a parcel-service truck, Mr. Tytell now refuses to ship typewriters under any circumstances. Getting a typewriter repaired by him is a hands-on, person-to-person deal.

Several afternoons last spring I sat on a swiveling typing chair by the clear space on the table where Mr. Tytell lets people test their typewriters before taking them home, and he and Mrs. Tytell and I talked. "People get very emotionally involved with their typewriters," Mr. Tytell said. "I understand it—I talk to typewriters myself sometimes. On the one hand, you have people who love a machine for whatever reason. On the other, sometimes you find a person with an extreme dislike, almost a hatred, for a particular machine. It's funny how the two go together. Recently I got a call from a lady and she had a portable typewriter, like new, and she wanted it out of her apartment right away. It's from a divorce or something; I didn't ask. She's not selling it, she says she'll pay *me* if I'll just come and take it away. Well, three hours earlier I had gotten a call from another lady; her husband had just lost a typewriter he loved, somebody stole it, and it was the exact same make and model this other lady described. So I went and picked up the machine, and when I got back, I called the other lady, and she rushed right down and bought it and carried it out the door. She was overjoyed.

"People hug and kiss me when I fix their typewriters sometimes. That call just now was from a lady I did a Latvian typewriter for—she was so happy I could hardly get her off the phone. I don't know why, a typewriter touches something inside. A couple—she's the secretary to the Episcopal Church in Manhattan—brought in an old Underwood for an overhaul, and I made it sing, and they came by the shop with coffee and cake to thank me, and the husband wrote me a poem in iambic pentameter. It's called 'Tytell, the Wizard King of Fulton Street.' You see, people get carried away. They write me letters, they send me fruit baskets, they give me miniature typewriters made out of porcelain. Almost everybody I deal with is an interesting person of some kind. Here's an invoice for a job I did for the only harp mechanic in the New York

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area, a guy who tunes and repairs harps, and he's decided he wants to translate Homer from the original Greek, and he wants me to make a typewriter in Homeric Greek for him. That's no problem—I've done ancient-Greek typewriters before. I even did a typewriter in hieroglyphics one time, for a curator at the Brooklyn Museum."

On a shelf across the table, just at eye level, was a typewriter bearing the Exxon logo. It looked big and black enough to spill ink all over Alaska, and I asked about it.

Mr. Tytell said that the oil company manufactured its own brand of electric typewriters briefly some years ago; he keeps this one for its oddity, and for parts. Then, back among the windings of his shop, he showed me the century in typewriters: a 1910 Hammond portable, with a keyboard that folded out on hinges and hung suspended in air; a Smith Premier Monarch of the 1920s, as solid and imposing as a safe; a Remington Noiseless from 1938, on which the type bar just kisses the roller, or platen, and the keys respond to the lightest touch; a Woodstock typewriter from the 1940s or 1950s, the brand sold for many years by Sears & Roebuck, on which Godrej & Boyce modeled the first manual typewriters it made; a TelePrompTer typewriter of the kind formerly used by TV studios to type up scripts for scrolling on TV monitors. Newer technology has made TelePrompTers obsolete, but Mr. Tytell still sells a few of them, usually to organizations that help the hard-of-seeing, who like the outsize type.

We sidled through right angles into a dark and cramped part of the shop where we had to proceed by flashlight. "In these cabinets reposes the largest collection of foreign type in the world—a hundred and forty-five languages, over two million separate pieces of type," he said, sweeping the beam over banks of minutely labeled metal drawers. Sixty years of converting typewriters to different alphabets has amassed this inventory; Mr. Tytell can list man's written languages better perhaps than any nontenured person in the world. "Over there are some languages of India—Hindi, Sindhi, Marathi, Punjabi, and Sanskrit—and next to that is Coptic, a church language of the Middle East; it's a beautiful-looking thing. Then there's Hausa, a language nobody here has ever heard of, spoken by twenty million people in northern Nigeria. Over there's Korean, and the Siamese I took off those Remingtons during the war, which I've relabeled Thai, and Aramaic script, and Hebrew, and Yiddish . . ." He pointed



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out with the flashlight drawers of Malay and Armenian and Amharic, and boxes of special symbols for pharmacists and mathematicians. One drawer seemed to be mostly unlabeled. He opened it and took out a small orange cardboard box and shone the light on the dozens of mint-bright rectangles of steel inside, each with its two tiny raised dots. "Nobody else in the world would even bother with this stuff," he said.

We wandered to a better-lit area of shelves filled with IBM Selectric typewriters circa 1970. The Selectric was to electric typewriters what the Underwood was to manuals, and it also is extinct. It has an equally dedicated following; fixing Selectrics is a lively part of Mr. Tytell's business. Mrs. Tytell, who had been on the phone, joined us. I asked Mr. and Mrs. Tytell what machine, of all the manual and electric typewriters ever made, they thought was the best. Mrs. Tytell said you couldn't really compare manuals and electrics. "I'm prejudiced," Mr. Tytell said, "because I spent so many years servicing Underwoods. Actually, I love all typewriters the same, but an Underwood manual with a serial number in the eight millions"—he climbed riskily onto a stepladder at another shelf and shakily handed one down—"which would be an Underwood made around 1959, is a beautiful machine." He pulled away the plastic that wrapped the typewriter. Its grayish-beige buffed finish, still in good shape, was pure 1959.

Mrs. Tytell tapped her clear-lacquered fingernail on a key in the upper right-hand corner of the keyboard. The key had a plus sign on top and an equal sign below. "This key on this particular kind of typewriter was the deciding piece of evidence in a multi-million-dollar fraud case I worked on a few years ago," she said. "A younger son of a wealthy man had been specifically excluded from inheriting some theaters the father had owned. An assignment document, typewritten and with the father's signature, gave the theaters to the older sons instead. The younger son was twelve when his father died, and he always felt that his father wouldn't have done that to him, because his father used to take him to these theaters all the time. The younger son grew up and became a lawyer and pursued this question, and finally he came to me with the assignment document, and I found that it was typed on an Underwood of this particular model and year. The assignment document had no plus or equal signs on it, but I was able to prove that the machine that had typed it also typed other documents that did have those signs, and that was the clincher. Underwood didn't add that particular key to their keyboard until well after the document in question was supposed to have been signed. When I explained all this to the lawyer for the older brothers, he said, 'So what?' A few weeks later they settled out of court for a lot of money."

In the 1980s Mrs. Tytell provided important evidence in the income-tax-evasion trial of the religious leader Sun Myung Moon. To prove that more than a million dollars in

bank deposits were church assets and not personal funds, Moon had produced a number of dated documents. Mrs. Tytell, who studied at the Institute of Paper Chemistry, examined the paper the documents were printed on, and eventually learned what mill had made the paper and what year it was made. Certain intricacies of the papermaking process meant she could have learned the month it was made and maybe even the day, but that wasn't necessary. The paper dated from a year after the date on the documents. "It was what you call a slam dunk," Mrs. Tytell said. Moon went to jail for about a year.

WHEN I remarked to Mr. and Mrs. Tytell that I had seen a certain manual typewriter for sale in a pawnshop in South Dakota, they said, simultaneously, "Buy it!" They said that you never see manual typewriters in pawnshops or at flea markets anymore. Suddenly typewriters have become valuable, and they turn up in museums and antique shows and Hollywood prop-company warehouses. Collectors see typewriters disappearing over the horizon and grab for them. Collecting may become a bigger part of the Tytells' business; Peter Tytell regards old typewriters as holy, and tells his parents to hang on to them, and is an avid collector himself. The thought of the typewriter's approaching antiquity reminds me of what happened to Latin, another antiquity. Once Latin was safely dead as a language, it acquired an appeal for scientists and others not only for its precision but because it would remain forever unchanged. Maybe the perfection in form and function of a 1959 Underwood manual will have a similar appeal for people who want a writing system they won't ever have to upgrade. Before I left Mr. Tytell, I asked him if he thought that the manual typewriter would survive.

"I'm eighty-three years old and I just signed a ten-year lease on this office," he said. "I'm an optimist, obviously. I hope they do survive—manual typewriters are where my heart is; they're what keep me alive. What's so intriguing about a manual typewriter is that it's all right there in front of you—all the thought that went into it, all these really smart guys that worked on it and gave their lives for it. The way these machines continue to function, it really is a miracle. You see some old beat-up machine in an attic or someplace and you touch the keys and it still works fine. Companies still make typewriter ribbons—the dry-goods business is as strong as ever—so obviously somebody's still using them. Like in the war, nobody was making typewriters, but people kept on using them anyway. A little bit of maintenance and regular use and you can keep a typewriter running a long time. These other machines, computers and so on, even electric typewriters, they have a soul that's hooked into the wall. A manual typewriter has a soul that doesn't need anything else in order to exist—it exists in itself. People are always going to like that about a manual." ☛

THE DISAPPEARING ALPHABET

by RICHARD WILBUR

*If the alphabet began to disappear,
Some words would soon look raggedy and queer
(Like QUIRREL, HIMPANZEE, AND CHOOCHOO-TRAI),
While others would entirely fade away.
And since it is by words that we construe
The world, the world would start to vanish too . . .*

What if there were no letter A?
Cows would eat HY instead of HAY.
What's HY? It's an unheard-of diet,
And cows are happy not to try it.

In the word DUMB the letter B is mute,
But elsewhere its importance is acute.
If it were absent, say, from BAT and BALL,
There'd be no big or little leagues at all.

If there were no such thing as C,
Whole symphonies would be off-key,
And under every nut tree you'd
See HIPMUNKS gathering winter food.

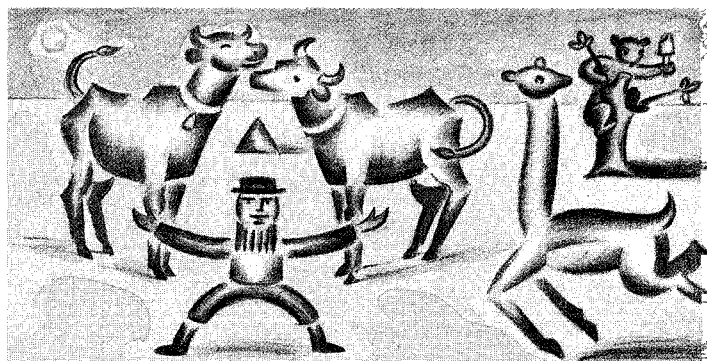
If D did not exist, some creatures might
Wish, like the dodo bird, to fade from sight.
For instance, any self-respecting DUCK
Would rather be extinct than be an UCK.

The lordly ELEPHANT is one whom we
Would have no name for if there were no E,
And how it would offend him were we to
Greet him as "Bud," or "Big Boy," or "Hey, you!"
The ELEPHANT is thick-skinned, but I'll bet
That that's a thing he never would forget.

Hail, letter F! If it were not for you,
Our raincoats would be merely WATERPROO,
And that is such a stupid word, I doubt
That it would help to keep the water out.

If G did not exist, the color GREEN
Would have to vanish from the rural scene.
Would oak trees, then, be blue, and pastures pink?
We would turn green at such a sight, I think.

An H can be too scared to speak, almost.
In gloomy words like GHASTLY, GHOUL, and GHOST,
The sound of H can simply not be heard.
But how it loves to say a cheerful word
Like HEALTH, or HAPPINESS, or HOLIDAY!
Or HALLELUJAH! Or HIP, HIP, HURRAY!



Without the letter **I**, there'd be
 No word for your **IDENTITY**,
 And so you'd find it very tough
 To tell yourself from other stuff.
 Sometimes, perhaps, you'd think yourself
 A jam jar on the pantry shelf.
 Sometimes you'd make a ticking sound
 And slowly move your hands around.
 Sometimes you'd lie down like a rug,
 Expecting to be vacuumed. Ugh!
 Surely, my friends, you now see why
 We need to keep the letter **I**.

If, all at once, there were no letter **J**,
 A cloud of big blue birds might fly away,
 And though they'd been an angry, raucous crew,
 I think that I would miss them, wouldn't you?

Is **K** unnecessary? "Heavens, no!
 It's in my name!" exclaims the **ESKIMO**.
 "And if there were no **K**, my little craft,
 The **KAYAK**, would be scuttled fore and aft."

It would be bitter, if there were no **L**,
 To bid the **LEMON** or the **LOON** farewell,
 And if the **LLAMA**, with its two-**L** name,
 Should leave us, it would be a *double* shame,
 But certainly it would be *triple* sad
 If **LOLLIPOPS** no longer could be had.

M is a letter, but it alternates
 As a Roman numeral often found in dates.
 If **M** should vanish, we would lose, my dears,
MINCE PIE, **MARSHMALLOWS**, and a thousand years.

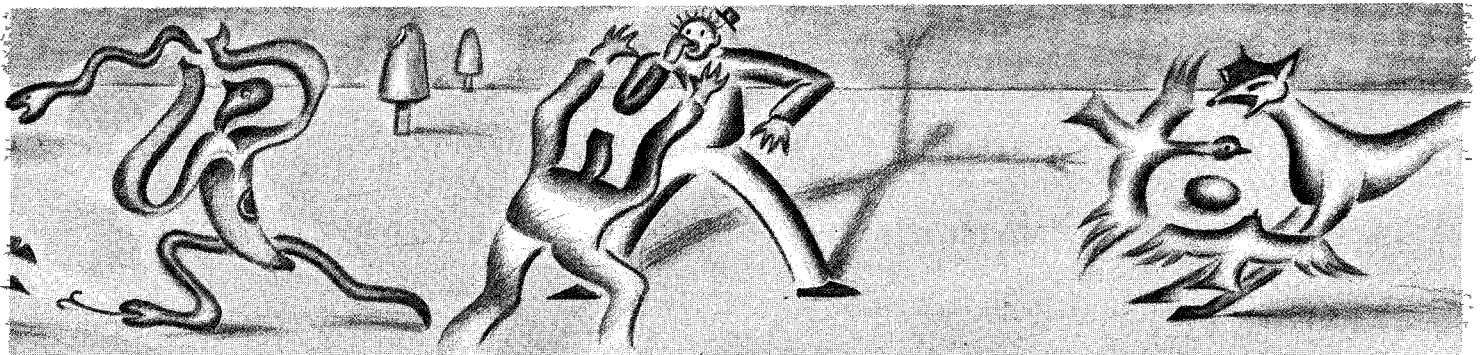
No **N**? In such a state of things,
 Birds would have **WIGS** instead of **WINGS**,
 And though a wig might suit the owl,
 Who is a staid and judgeline fowl,
 Most birds would rather fly than wear
 A mat of artificial hair.
 What would our proud bald eagle say
 If he were offered a toupee?
 I think it would be better, then,
 For us to keep the letter **N**.

What if there were no letter **O**?
 You couldn't **COME**, you couldn't **GO**,
 You couldn't **ROVE**, you couldn't **ROAM**,
 And yet you couldn't stay at **HOME**!
 Where would you be had heaven not sent you
 The letter **O** to orient you?

How strange that the banana's slippery **PEEL**,
 Without its **P**, would be a slippery **EEL**!
 It makes you think! However, it is not
 Profound enough to think about a lot.

What if the letter **Q** should be destroyed?
 Millions of **Us** would then be unemployed.
 For **Q** and **U** belong like *tick* and *tock*,
 Except, of course, in places like **IRAQ**.

What if there were no **R**? Your boat, I fear,
 Would have no **RUDDER**, and so you couldn't steer.
 How helplessly you'd drift then, and be borne
 Through churning seas, and swept around the Horn!
 But happily you couldn't come to grief
 On **ROCKS**, or run aground upon a **REEF**.



What if the letter **S** were missing?
COBRAS would have no way of hissing,
And all their kin would have to take
The name of ERPENT or of NAKE.

At breakfast time the useful letter **T**
Preserves us all from eating SHREDDED WHEA.

Without the letter **U** you couldn't say,
"I think I'd like to visit URUGUAY,"
And so you'd stay forever in North Platte,
New Paltz, or Scranton, or some place like that.

Were there no **V**, would geese still fly
In V FORMATION in the sky,
Calling it something else instead,
Like "angle," "wedge," or "arrowhead"?
Perhaps. Or they might take the shape
Of smoke rings or of ticker tape,
Or spell out words like HERE WE GO
Or NUTS TO YOU. You never know.

What if there were no letter **W**?
The WEREWOLF would no longer trouble you,
And you'd be free of many evils
Like WARTS and WEARINESS and WEEVILS.

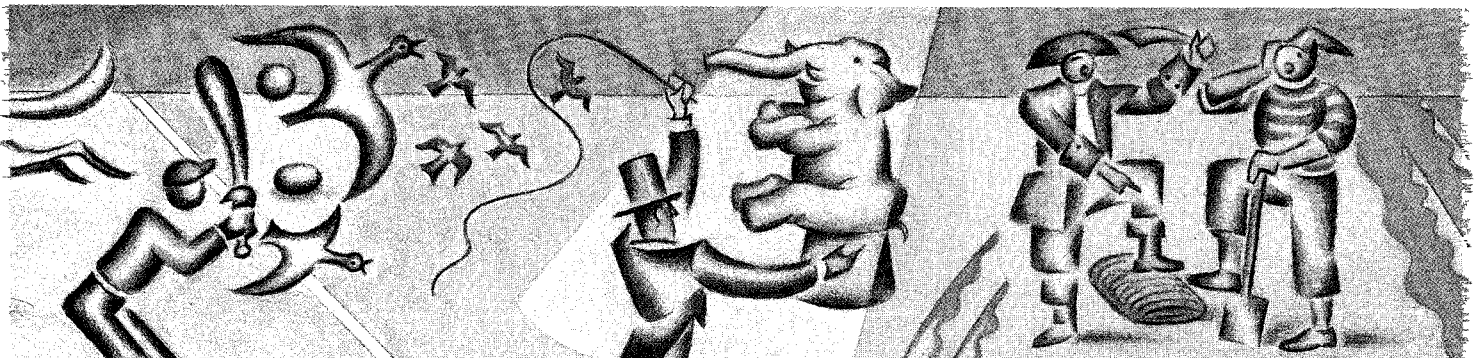
But then there'd be (alas!) no sweet
WATERMELONS for you to eat.

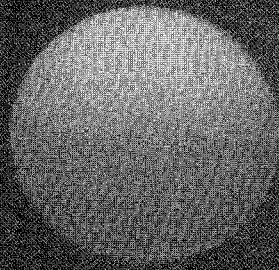
The letter **X** will never disappear:
The more you cross it out, the more it's here.
But if it vanished, treasure maps would not
Have anything with which to *mark the spot*,
And treasure isles would ring with the despair
Of puzzled pirates digging everywhere.

Lacking the letter **Y**, I guess
We'd have no way of saying YES,
Or even saying MAYBE, and so
There'd be no answer left but NO.
How horrible! Who wants to live
A life so very negative,
Refusing presents, RASPBERRY ice,
Fudge cake, and everything that's nice?

Because they're always BUZZING, honeybees
Could not be with us if there were no Zs,
And many Zs are needed, furthermore,
When people feel the need to SNOOZE and snore.
Long live the **Z**, then! Not for any money
Would I give up such things as sleep and honey.

*Good heavens! It would be an awful mess
If everything dissolved to nothingness!
Be careful then, my friends, and do not let
Anything happen to the alphabet.*





Our Real China Problem

by MARK HERTSGAARD

The price of China's surging economy is a vast degradation of the environment, with planetary implications. Although the Chinese government knows the environment needs protecting, writes the author, who spent six weeks inside China investigating the growing environmental crisis, it fears that doing the right thing could be political suicide

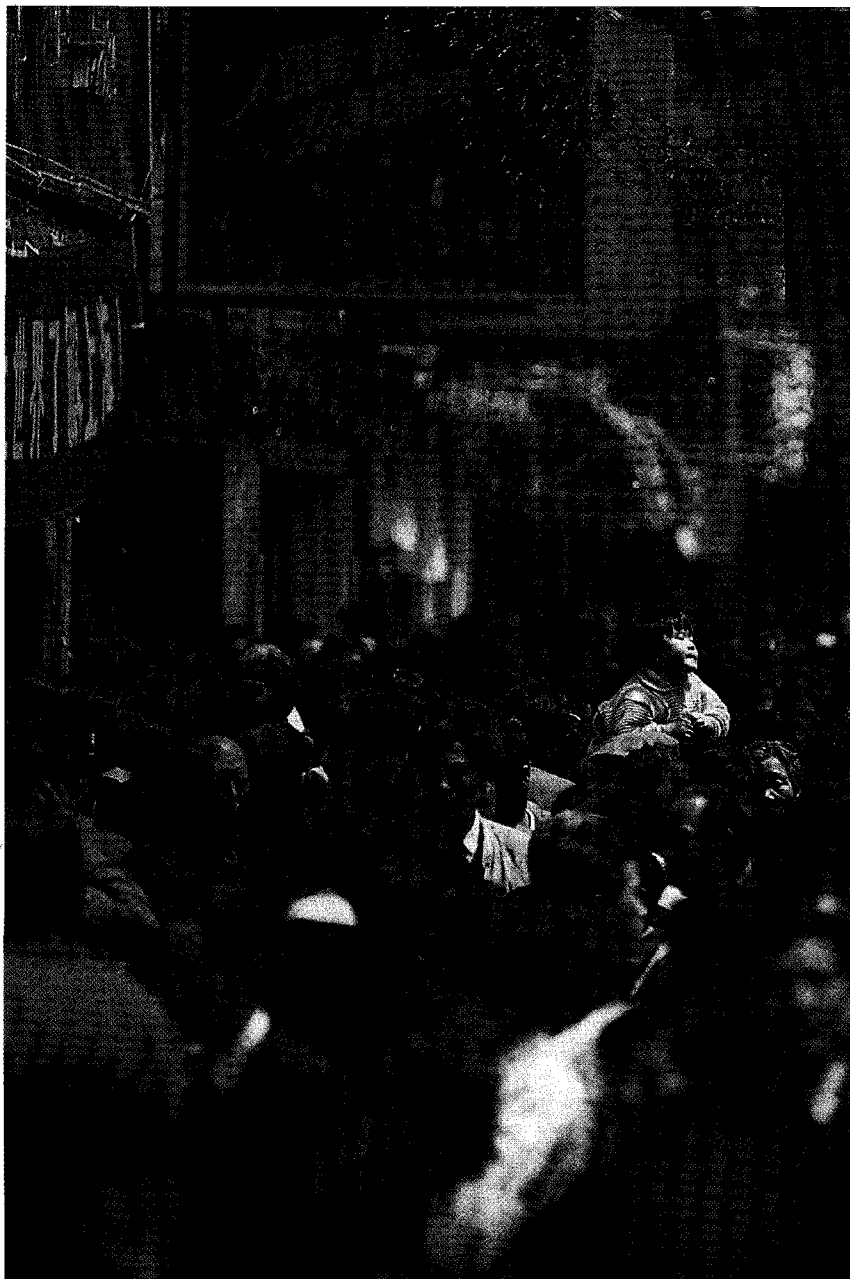


CHONGQING, the Yangtze River city that Americans may know as Chungking, is a naturally foggy place. It also suffers some of the worst pollution in all China, which puts it among the strong candidates for most polluted city in the world. When the fog and the pollution are both at their thickest, locals say, "if you stretch your hand out in front of your face, you cannot see your fingers."

Visibility was somewhat better than that when I visited Chongqing one morning recently. Perched high above the Jialin River, which also flows through the city, I peered into the dank grayness before me. I could dimly make

out a black-and-white tugboat hugging the far shore of the river and, beyond that, the outlines of what might be office buildings. This was the view from the back of the Chongqing Paper Factory, a massive state-owned facility that local environmental officials had singled out as evidence of how well they were cleaning up Chongqing. Built in the 1940s, the factory had been for a long time a terrible polluter, discharging enough chlorine and other toxic chemicals into the Jialin "to cover the entire river with white foam," according to a top official of the Chongqing Environmental Protection Bureau who must remain nameless. Now, however, the official bragged in an interview, the factory had been all but shut down. "Our strategy has been to press them to death!" he said.

Early morning in Beijing



At the factory, though, it didn't look that way. The official discouraged me from trying to visit ("I myself would have to seek permission to enter," he said scoldingly), but Zhenbing, my interpreter, and I found the front gate open when we arrived, and since no one stopped us, we simply walked in. At the back of the plant a set of concrete steps led down to the Jialin River, perhaps eighty yards below. Halfway down Zhenbing and I cut left across the exposed riverbank, our shoes leaving clear prints on the dark, sandy soil.

Within seconds we saw a broad stream of bubbling water cascading out the back of the plant and down the hillside. The astringent odor of chlorine attacked our nostrils, and once we reached the stream's edge, the smell was so

Seeking elbow room, Shanghai

powerful that we immediately backed away. Below us, where the discharge emptied into the Jialin, a frothy white plume was spreading across the slow-moving river.

Fifty yards farther on we encountered a second stream, this one a mere foot wide but clogged with pineapple-sized clumps of dried orange foam. Beyond was a third creek. Its stench identified it as household sewage (workers in China's state-owned factories generally live on site or nearby), but its most extraordinary feature was its color—as black as used motor oil. Not ten yards away a grizzled peasant in a dark-blue Mao jacket and trousers (an outfit still worn in China by the poor) bent over a tiny vegetable patch to pick some greens for his midday meal.

All this was dwarfed by what lay ahead. The vapor was what we saw first—wispy white, it hung low in the air, like tear gas. Stepping closer, we heard the sound of gushing water. Not until we were merely footsteps away, however, could we see the source of the commotion: a vast, roaring torrent of white, easily thirty yards wide, splashing down the hillside like a waterfall of boiling milk.

Again the scent of chlorine was unmistakable, but this waterfall was much whiter than the first. Decades of unhindered discharge had left the rocks coated with a creamlike residue, creating a perversely beautiful white-on-white effect. Above us the waterfall had bent trees sideways; below, it split into five channels before pouring into the unfortunate Jialin. All this and yet the factory, as one worker had informed us, was operating at about 25 percent of capacity.

Hoping to leave the factory grounds by another exit, Zhenbing and I were trudging up a service road when a man wearing the olive-green greatcoat of the Chinese military came running directly at us. It seemed that our unauthorized factory tour might end badly after all. But no. Military greatcoats turn out to be a bit like Mao jackets in China these days: lots of people wear them, because

**WHAT HAPPENS
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OF OUR TIME: WILL HUMAN
CIVILIZATION SURVIVE
THE ENVIRONMENTAL
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AT THE END OF THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY?**



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they are cheap and functional. In any case, this man had different worries. Liquid was spilling from two large, loosely connected hoses by the side of the road, one leading back up to the factory and the other stretching down to the river. The man barked orders at two workers straddling the hoses, and they stepped back. Then, without a word of warning to Zhenbing and me—though we were standing only five feet away—he knelt and tightened the connection between the hoses.

Instantly he was engulfed in an explosion of gas. But he was ready for it, and in one fluid motion he straightened and started sprinting back along the road, vanishing behind the billowing cloud of chlorine after two steps. Zhenbing and I were not ready for it, but forward was the only way out, so we held our breath and plunged after him. Six running strides brought us past the worst of it, but even then we were surrounded by huge puffs of gas, which started us coughing fiercely.

Thirty yards up the road we were still sputtering when we passed three dump trucks parked against the factory wall. A dozen workers were lounging in the backs of the trucks. The man in the greatcoat, who had run all the way here, was bending down to tie his shoe. Chlorine is the chemical that was used to kill soldiers in the poison-gas attacks of the First World War, but the men in the trucks showed no concern about the vapors floating past their heads. They only elbowed one another and stared at the foreigner trudging past their factory—evidently a far more unusual sight.

Zhenbing and I walked in silence to the plant's side exit and left. We were in the middle of a six-week trip through China to investigate the environmental crisis, and it was not a cheering assignment. In Beijing, Xi'an, and other cities of the north Zhenbing and I had walked in air so thick with coal dust and car fumes that even sunny days looked overcast and foggy. In the bone-dry province of Shanxi, a day's journey west of Beijing, we had ridden by train for hours without seeing anything that resembled woods—there were only a few

scattered, spindly trees, which looked ready to expire any minute. Everywhere, it seemed, the land had been scalped, the water poisoned, the air made toxic and dark.

Despite witnessing all this, Zhenbing was not exactly a militant environmentalist. Born into a very poor rural family thirty years ago, he, like most Chinese I had met, was quite willing to put up with filthy air and polluted water if it meant more jobs, better pay, a chance to get ahead. But today's experience had shaken my new friend. Outside the factory we were waiting for the bus back downtown. I was scribbling in my notebook when, behind me, I heard Zhenbing murmuring, as if in a dream, "My poor country. My poor country."

The "Soft-Law" Syndrome

HUMAN rights, China's possible admission to the World Trade Organization, its alleged Washington influence-buying—these are the issues that have made international headlines in the months leading up to this fall's Sino-U.S. summit. But soon China's environmental crisis is bound to command equal attention. China claims that its population is 1.22 billion people (as of the end of 1996). The true number is certainly higher than that. But even the official figure means that nearly one out of every four human beings on earth lives in China. The Chinese economy is ranked anywhere from the third to the seventh largest in the world, and is expected to be No. 1 by 2010. Incomes have doubled since Deng Xiaoping initiated his marketplace reforms in 1979, and the environmental side effects have been devastating.

At least five of the cities with the worst air pollution in the world are in China. Sixty to 90 percent of the rainfall in Guangdong, the southern province that is the center of China's economic boom, is acid rain. Since nearly all the gasoline in China is leaded (Beijing switched to unleaded gas in June), and 80 percent of the coal isn't "washed" before being burned, people's lungs and

nervous systems are bombarded by an extraordinary volume and variety of deadly poisons. One of every four deaths in China is caused by lung disease, brought about by the air pollution and the increasingly fashionable habit of cigarette smoking. Suburban sprawl and soil erosion gobbled up more than 86 million acres of farmland from 1950 to 1990—as much as all the farmland in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Farmland losses have continued in the 1990s, raising questions about China's ability to feed itself in years to come, especially as rising incomes lead to more meat-intensive diets.

Even the government's official policy pronouncements, which invariably overaccentuate the positive, admit that environmental degradation in China will get worse before it gets better. For China's newfound wealth has only whetted its citizens' appetite for more. China's huge population wants to join the global middle class, with everything that entails: cars, air-conditioners, closets full of clothes, jet travel. Rising consumer demand has already resulted in chronic widespread electricity shortages. Thus China plans to build more than a hundred new power stations over the next decade, adding 18,000 megawatts of capacity every year—roughly the equivalent of Louisiana's entire power grid. By 2020 its coal consumption will have doubled, if not tripled. All this will not only worsen the country's acid-rain and air-pollution problems; it will endanger the entire planet, by accelerating the global warming that scientists say is already under way.

China's huge population and grand economic ambitions make it the most important environmental actor in the world today, with the single exception of the United States. Like the United States, China could all but single-handedly make climate change, ozone depletion, and a host of other hazards a reality for people all over the world. What happens in China is therefore central to one of the great questions of our time: Will human civilization survive the many environmental pressures crowding in on it at the end of the twentieth century?

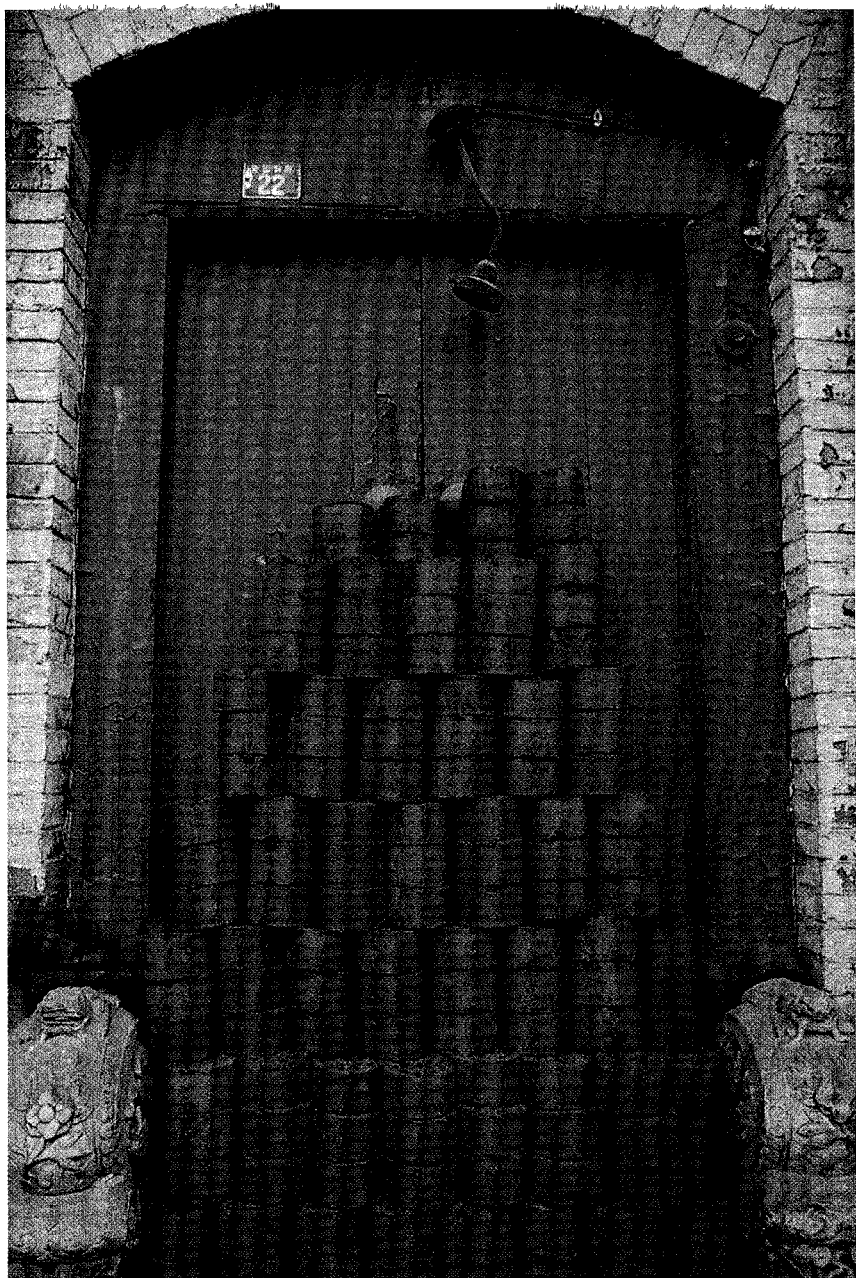
A coal supply in Beijing

Like governments the world over, China's leaders have learned to say the right things about the environment. In 1992 China was an enthusiastic participant in the United Nations Earth Summit. In July of last year President Jiang Zemin and Premier Li Peng began to speak out against environmental destruction and to urge a shift toward "sustainable development." China has also adopted comprehensive environmental laws and regulations that on paper compare favorably with—indeed, were often modeled on—their Western equivalents.

But the future is shaped less by official rhetoric than by what actually happens on the ground, and as the Chongqing Paper Factory illustrates, environmental laws are often simply not implemented in China. This is no state secret; most of the dozens of government officials I interviewed acknowledged the pervasiveness of the problem, often without prompting. Sometimes the culprit is corruption: factory owners use *guanxi*—personal connections—or bribery to get local regulators to look the other way. Beijing either can't or won't stop them. As the ancient Chinese adage says, "The mountains are high, and the Emperor is far away."

Even more common, and intractable, is the so-called soft-law syndrome. Under soft law the government excuses state-owned companies from full compliance with environmental laws and standards; the law is "softened" in order to spare the companies (and the state banks supporting them) from bankruptcy and to shield their workers from unemployment. In contrast to corruption, soft law is not something Chinese officials like to talk about.

Right after the explosion at the paper factory I had lunch with Hu Jiquan, a top government economist in Chongqing. Keen to encourage foreign investment, Hu was pledging that the local environment would improve in years to come, thanks to tougher law enforcement. "We will close factories if we have to," Hu said. "We've already closed more than two hundred of them." Hav-



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POLLUTION AND BY THE
HABIT OF SMOKING.

ing just returned from the chlorine waterfall, I couldn't help challenging this rosy vision, and Hu was honest enough to concede that short-term economic considerations often do override environmental goals in China. "The trouble is, if we close that factory, many workers will lose their jobs, and our government would rather support the workers than protect the water," he said with a shrug.

Hu then extended his explanation, though he first told Zhenbing not to translate this part for the foreigner. The government of Chongqing knew perfectly well that the paper plant should be closed immediately. In fact, it had tried to shut the plant months earlier (just as the unnamed official quoted earlier had bragged), "but the local peo-

ple and leaders complained a lot, so the government backed off. It was afraid of social unrest.”

This is the crux of the Chinese environmental problem. The government knows the environment needs protecting, but it fears the social consequences. Bluntly put, it worries that doing the right thing environmentally could be political suicide.

A Long Nightmare of Deprivation

THE government would like to protect the environment for a very simple reason: senior officials have come to realize that environmental degradation costs money—indeed, it threatens to derail China’s entire economic-modernization program. Li Yining, a grand old man of market economics, who was one of the masterminds of China’s transition to private enterprise, told me in an interview that “inadequate ecological protection” was one of the few things that could prevent China’s economy from growing at 10 percent a year “for a very long time.” Acid rain, for example, causes \$2.8 billion worth of damage to forests, agriculture, and industry in China every year. Air pollution raises health-care costs and lowers workers’ productivity. Deforestation worsens the floods that already kill thousands of Chinese every year. The list goes on. The official *China Daily* estimates that the annual cost of China’s environmental degradation is seven percent of the gross domestic product. Vaclav Smil, a geographer at the University of Manitoba and a leading expert on China’s environment, calculates the cost at no less than 10 to 15 percent of GDP. If Smil is correct, then the much-celebrated growth of China’s economy is, in effect, being canceled out by associated environmental degradation. In short, the economy is running hard but poisoning its own future. The problem, of course, is that faithfully implementing environmental laws would require closing hundreds of thousands of factories and throwing tens of millions of people out of work.

The Chinese people have long and bitter experience with scarcity and are understandably eager to leave it behind. As recently as 1949 life expectancy was only thirty-nine years, a level not seen in Europe since the Industrial Revolution. All Chinese over forty have firsthand memories of the greatest man-made disaster of the twentieth century, the famine caused by Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward campaign. As Jasper Becker, the Beijing bureau chief of the *South China Morning Post*, documents in *Hungry Ghosts* (1997), the famine killed some 30 million people from 1959 to 1961 and brought starvation, misery, and even cannibalism to rural China.

Today the average Chinese life-span is about seventy years, yet scores of millions still live in desperate poverty. In one village I visited in Sichuan province, on a very cold day when my feet were only just comfortable inside heavily insulated hiking boots, I watched a grim-faced peasant woman washing her family’s clothes in the river, her bare feet dangling in the frigid water. On the other side of the village a man, also barefoot, stamped around on a pile of loose, moist coal, looking like an eighteenth-century European peasant crushing grapes for wine. In fact he was manufacturing the briquettes of fuel whose carcinogenic combustion would provide what little heat he and his neighbors enjoyed in their windowless mud huts.

Now that China is at last awakening from its long nightmare of deprivation, the Communist Party’s tattered legitimacy depends on keeping the economic expansion going, and extending it to the many regions that still lag behind. Yet the marketplace reforms that have sparked double-digit economic growth in China have also brought pain to vast portions of the population. As a result, there has been much more social unrest in China in recent years than most outsiders realize. The mass occupation of Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the army’s subsequent massacre of unarmed demonstrators are well known. But similarly militant protests took place at the same time in cities and towns throughout China; that news did

not reach the outside world because there were no foreign journalists on hand to report it. Recently, as the transition from state-organized economy to private-market free-for-all has touched the lives of more and more Chinese, thousands of wildcat strikes and street demonstrations have occurred across the country, especially in Manchuria, a bastion of heavy industry, where unemployment rates now exceed 30 percent. WE DON’T WANT DEMOCRACY, WE WANT TO SURVIVE, declared one protest banner in the city of Shenyang.

All this has left Party leaders determined to keep the economy growing no matter what. They believe that Tiananmen Square was not primarily about politics—about the issues of democracy and human rights that dominated Western news reports—but about economics. There is truth to this. Hundreds of thousands of average Chinese followed the students into the streets not only because they yearned to breathe free but also because they were angry about hyperinflation, corruption, and their own uncertain economic prospects. The Party saw its life flash before its eyes in 1989, and it got a second warning in 1991, when its erstwhile “big brother,” the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, fell from power. The Chinese Communists are determined not to suffer the same fate. As Deng Xiaoping warned his fellow Party leaders after Tiananmen Square, if the Party cannot improve the welfare of the people, the people will go into the streets.

Environmental Revolts

BUT there is a Catch-22. The people, it seems, will also go into the streets if their local environment becomes intolerably polluted—if, for example, they are deprived of safe drinking water.

“There were social revolts along the Huai River, so the State Council [China’s Cabinet] had to react,” one retired senior government official told me, recalling the most dramatic government crackdown on pollution to date. The



Pete Sampras: Winner of four U.S. Open titles; three consecutive Wimbledon titles; and in 1996 ranked number one in the world for the fourth straight year. Said *The New York Times* of Sampras: "It's just possible we have a latter day classic on our hands."

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***Industrial pollution in rural
Sichuan and urban Shenyang***

Huai region, located about 200 miles northwest of Shanghai, is the most densely populated of China's seven major river basins: 110 million inhabitants share 108,000 square miles of land. The river had been severely polluted for years, but it got drastically worse in July of 1994, when a sudden flood of toxins turned the river black and deadly for weeks. Hundreds of thousands of people were left without drinking water, several thousand were treated for dysentery, diarrhea, and vomiting, and 26 million pounds of fish were killed.

Popular outrage took many forms, including pelting local officials with eggs when they blocked foreign journalists from filming the river. The most extraordinary moment came when a top leader from Beijing, Song Jian, the elderly chairman of the State Council's environment committee, arrived to inspect the site. Somehow one brave and resourceful peasant managed to give Song a glass of river water to drink. Song took a sip of the putrid brew; then he turned to the local and provincial officials flanking him and shrewdly invited them to drain the glass. These officials had ignored earlier pleas to close the paper, leather, and dyeing factories whose waste fouled the Huai. Song told them they would be sacked if the offending factories were not shut promptly. Last summer the government closed 999 paper mills and untold numbers of other factories.

If Beijing fears social unrest so much, why did it shut all those factories? One reason, said the retired senior government official, was that "for years no boy from [certain villages in] the Huai River area has been healthy enough to pass the physical examination required to enter the army." Even more important, said other observers, these factories were "township and village enterprises," or TVEs—small, privately owned plants that employed no more than a few dozen workers each. TVEs employed at most tens of thousands of moonlighting peasants who had never stopped work-



**FEW
SCATTERED,
SPINDLY**

TREES LOOKED READY TO

EXPIRE ANY MINUTE.

EVERYWHERE, IT SEEMED,

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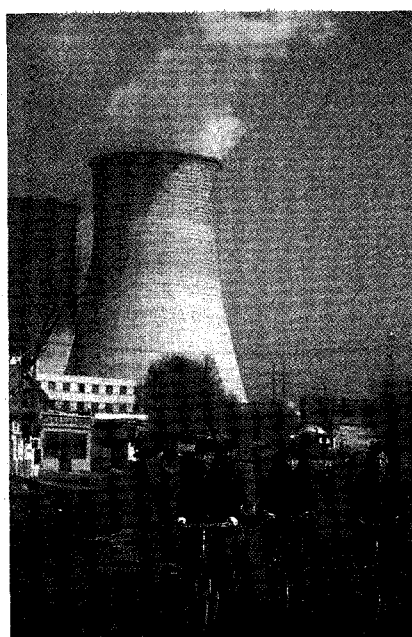
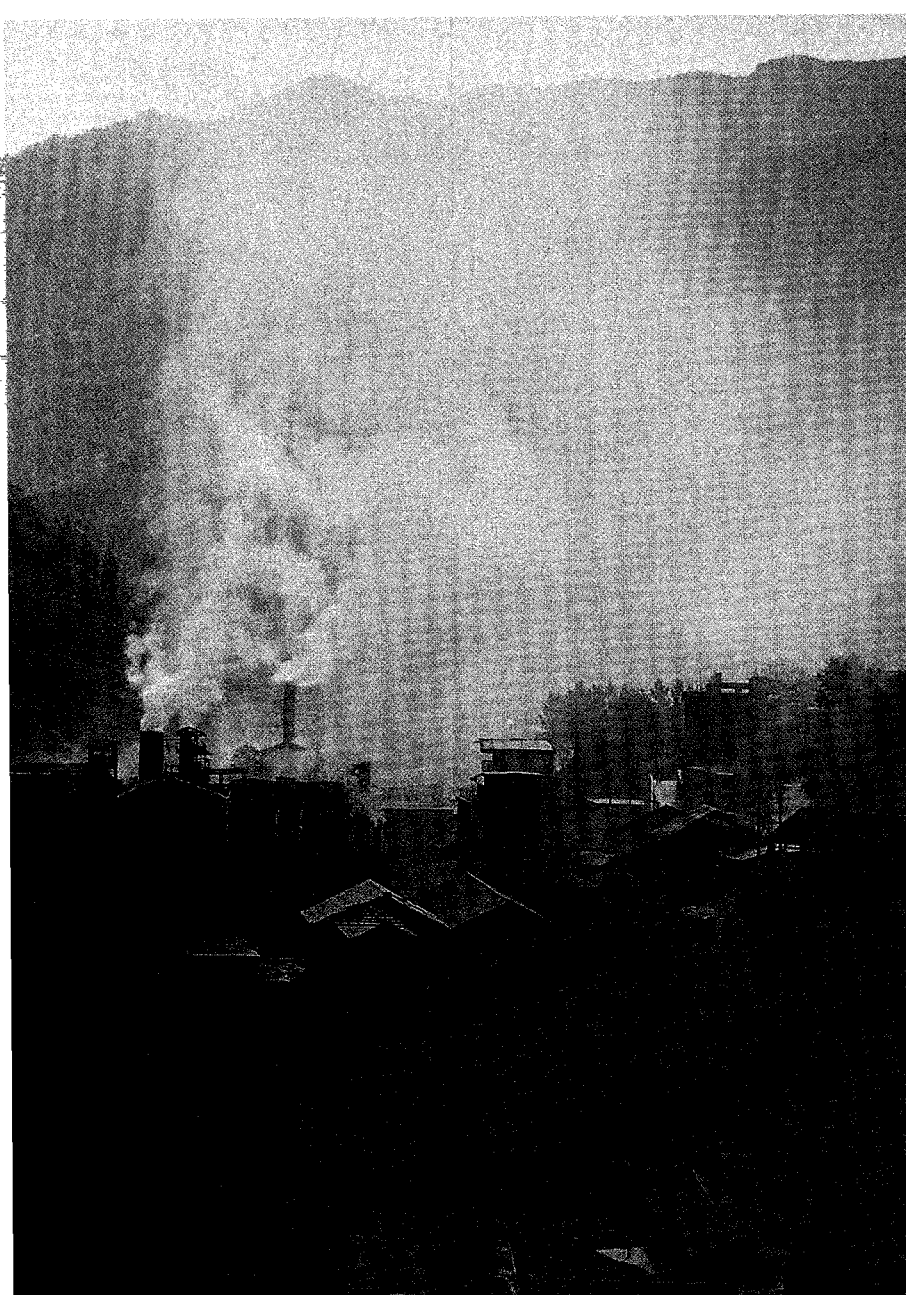
SCALPED, THE WATER

POISONED, THE AIR MADE

TOXIC AND DARK.

ing in their fields. Against that fact the government had to weigh the anger of the many hundreds of thousands of people who relied on the Huai for their drinking water—people who had already demonstrated a capacity for protest. There was no question which group should be placated.

Beijing went national with the campaign against TVEs in August of last year, when the State Council ordered some 60,000 heavily polluting factories to close. "That sounds like a big number, but in a country as large as China it amounts to only one percent of the total number of enterprises and workers," Ye Requi, a deputy administrator of the National Environmental Protection Agency, told me. Ye nevertheless argued that the closings "show the seriousness of the



government in this area.” Unfortunately, TVEs account for only a fraction of China’s pollution—estimates range from five to 30 percent. To make a real dent in the problem, state-owned enterprises like the Chongqing Paper Factory would have to be closed. But fear of social unrest makes that problematic, as it does the recent pledge by Party leaders to end state ownership of 10,000 of China’s 13,000 largest industrial enterprises.

Thus China’s leaders find themselves in a box. They can, in the name of economic growth, leave the big factories and other environmental hazards essentially undisturbed and hope that the resulting pollution and ecological destruction do not trigger either unmanageable popular protest or long-run economic stagnation. Or they can clamp

down, clean up, and face the double short-term risk of a stalled economy and a wrathful proletariat. Not an enviable choice, but for Chinese leaders not a difficult one either. As Chen Qi, the top environmental official in Liaoning, a region of bitter winter cold and 30 percent unemployment, explained to me, “Heavy pollution may kill you in a hundred days, but without enough heat and food you die in three.”

The Collapse of the One-Child Policy

THE most pervasive environment-related myth about China is that couples are allowed to have only one child. But in truth the one-child policy has long been “more

slogan than reality,” in the words of a top Chinese demographer. The Party was forced by popular resistance to back off from the policy—another example of social unrest driving government decisions. Enraged peasants were actually attacking and killing local Party leaders and their families.

When one Party boss in southern China forced a woman to abort in her seventh month of pregnancy, he lived to regret it. The woman and her husband already had a daughter, but like all Chinese peasants, they wanted a son—the only old-age insurance available in China. During the abortion it was discovered that the woman had been carrying two sons—twins. When the father heard this news, Steven W. Mosher reports in *Broken Earth* (1983), he ex-

ploded in a murderous rage and ran through the village to the house of the Party leader. There the father grabbed the leader's two sons, aged eight and ten, and hurled them down the courtyard well. He then leaped in after them, closing the circle of death with suicide.

Such attacks apparently convinced Beijing that the one-child policy posed a threat to Party authority. In 1984, five years after the policy was inaugurated, it was relaxed, though in rural areas only.

Today the one-child family is all but unheard of in rural China, where nearly three out of four Chinese live. In my six weeks of travel, which took me from Liaoning and Hebei provinces in the north through Shanxi and Sichuan in the middle west to Hunan and Guangdong in the south, I talked with scores of peasant families. I was the first foreigner that some of these peasants, especially the children, had ever seen. Every family I met had at least two children; many had three or four, and some had five or more. In a village near the Pearl River I shot baskets with a boy of ten who shyly told me that he was the youngest of seven. It seems that the only Chinese who do adhere to the one-child target are urban dwellers—especially those who work directly for the government and thus can be easily monitored, and penalized through the withholding of salaries, promotions, and the like.

All of which casts strong doubt on official claims regarding China's population: that Chinese women average only two births each; that the population will not reach 1.5 billion until 2030; that it will peak at 1.6 billion in 2046. Although some newly affluent families are, in the familiar demographic pattern, having fewer children, the gross numbers are almost certainly greater. The truth is that no one knows exactly how big China's population is, or how fast it is growing.

"Ten years ago China had a reputation for having the best population statistics in the world, because there was no way for its people to hide what they were doing from the government," Gu Baochang, the associate director of the

official China Population Information and Research Center, told me. "But today Chinese figures have become very questionable. The problem is, the local Party leaders compete with one another to post the lowest birth rate, just as they compete to have the highest economic growth rate. . . . So at each level of authority the targets get tightened. If the central government sets a target of eighteen births per thousand people this year, the provincial leaders tell county officials no, they must achieve sixteen, and the county leaders tell village officials no, it must be fourteen." The regrettable results, Gu added, include a renewed coercion of women, continued abortions of female fetuses, and underreporting of the nation's true birth rates up the chain of command.

Yet even scrupulously honest reporting would not change the fundamental fact that Chinese leaders waited too long to attack the problem. In the late 1950s Mao brushed aside warnings about the approaching difficulties, arguing that China could always produce its way out of trouble, since "every mouth is born with two hands attached." Not until 1971, when the population already exceeded 850 million, did China begin pursuing birth control in earnest. The "later, longer, fewer" program urged later marriages, increased spacing between children, and a limit of two children per family. It was both less coercive and more successful than the subsequent one-child policy, reducing average births per woman from 5.8 in 1970 to 2.8 by 1977—a remarkable achievement. But it was not enough. Because the base number—China's population—was already so large, even this lower rate of growth translated into huge absolute increases.

That dynamic still operates today, which may be why President Jiang in 1996 spoke of reanimating the one-child policy. Even if the official Chinese claim of 2.0 births per woman is accurate, that amounts to an annual increase of 15 million people. "So even though China has reduced its fertility as much as possible," Gu explained to me, "the total population is still growing as much as it was

in the early 1970s, when women were having four or more children each."

Population growth is probably China's most important environmental issue, because it magnifies all others. For example, China ranks near the very bottom in global comparisons of per capita supplies of arable land, fresh water, and forests. This is in part because so much of China's land is arid, and in part because Mao, in his mad Great Leap Forward, ordered millions of trees to be cut down. But the country's gargantuan population makes a bad situation worse.

Beijing has so little water that Party leaders have questioned whether the city can remain the capital, according to Yu Yuefeng, the staff director of the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Conservation Committee of the National People's Congress. With a nervous chuckle, Yu told me that the problem has eased in the past two years, thanks to higher than normal rainfall, but, he conceded, "This is a roll of the dice. We have to rely on the gods to keep the rains coming." In his privileged Party position Yu can afford to laugh. The problem is not so amusing for some 50 million people in rural northern China who must walk for miles or wait for days to obtain any drinking water at all. As for farmland, population growth has reduced the supply per person to about the size of one third of a tennis court.

Everywhere I visited, I noticed that China *felt* crowded. How could it not? China's population is five times that of the United States, even though the two countries occupy roughly the same amount of land area. But since deserts and mountains make the western half of China inhospitable to human settlement, 90 percent of its population lives in the east. Imagine, then, almost nine times as many people living east of the Mississippi as live there in real life. That is everyday reality in China.

In all the thousands of miles of scenery I observed during my travels, I cannot recall a single place without signs of intense human settlement. Open space was for farming, period, and was cultivated to within an inch of its life, with furrows reaching right to the edge

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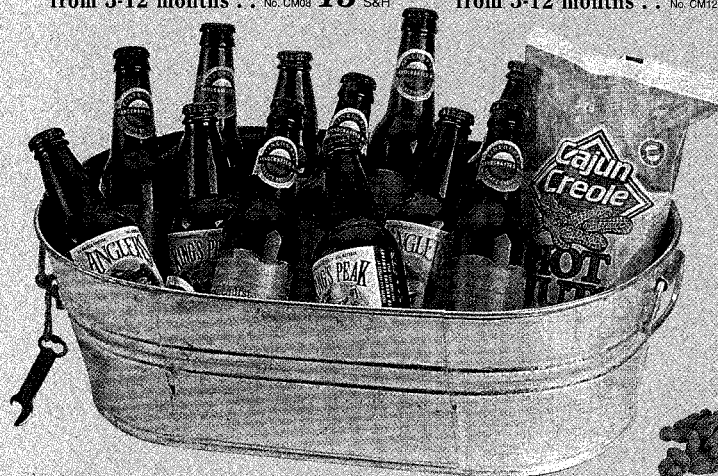
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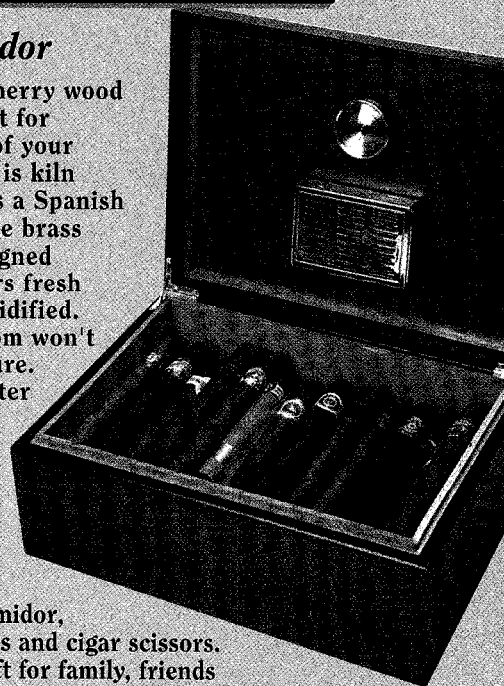
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Field and factory, Shenzhen

the way forward, just as they honestly believe that using headlights at night wastes gas and causes accidents), making one's way across town is a stressful adventure. Negotiating the sidewalks is no better, partly because the pavement is invariably covered with many kinds of litter: plastic bags, peanut shells, cigarette boxes, food cartons, construction-site refuse, and other unsavory items. Pedestrians don't necessarily try to crash into one another, but they certainly don't shrink from it. Intersections are bedlam. There are no STOP signs, very few traffic lights, and no concept of right-of-way, so everyone simply presses forward at all times. Crossing the street often resembles a game of chicken, with pedestrian and driver inching ahead in apparent disregard of each other until someone blinks. In the swarming cacophony of urban China one presses forward or gets run over.

Public transportation in China is not for the claustrophobic, to put it mildly. In trains and buses one's body is constantly pressed against, usually from two or more sides, by the bodies of other passengers, who seem neither to notice nor to care. As they have done with so many discomforts over the years, the Chinese have grown used to such close proximity. Zhenbing and I were once standing in line at a train station, waiting to offer the bribe necessary to gain sleeper tickets, when suddenly I felt myself grabbed from behind and moved aside as roughly as if I were blocking Patrick Ewing's path to the basket. I'm not the fighting type, but I instinctively whirled around to find . . . no one. The culprit, a man in his sixties, had already hurried past me, intent on his destination. There had been no malice in his gesture, only the natural impatience of an animal who has been confined in too small a space with too many others for too long a time. I tried to take a calming deep breath, but my lungs couldn't reach it. Not for the last time in China, I felt as if I had stumbled into some fiendish laboratory experiment that was mushrooming beyond control.

of any road and curling into hollows as small as pitcher's mounds. In daylight hours the cities become churning masses of congestion. Although China has only one car for every 150 inhabitants (the United States has one for every two), that still means a huge number of cars. Jockeying for space alongside them are sky-blue cargo trucks, ancient city buses, an occasional horse-drawn wagon, and an endless fleet of bicycles—many of them three-wheeled cargo bikes, transporting everything from bulging sacks of fruit and vegetables to freshly skinned sides of pork to couches, toilets, and televisions.

Traffic jams are the rule. Since no vehicle seems capable of forward motion without frequent beeps of its horn (Chinese drivers say this is necessary to clear

A **S FOR**
FARMLAND,
POPULATION
GROWTH HAS REDUCED
THE SUPPLY PER PERSON
TO ABOUT THE SIZE
OF ONE THIRD OF A TENNIS
COURT. OPEN SPACE IS
CULTIVATED TO WITHIN AN
INCH OF ITS LIFE.

The Meaning of Spitting

WALKING down the sidewalk in China was a challenge not only because of all the people I had to dodge but also because of the puddles of spit they left in my path. Everyone, it seems, spits in China—on the sidewalk, in the classroom, on the train, in restaurants. The habit is universal. During a daylong train ride from Shenyang I was wedged between a sniffing peasant girl on one side and her older brother or cousin on the other. We had “hard-seat” tickets—the lowest class, and the only ones available. I was a curiosity to these peasants, and to show friendship the young man offered me a few of the sunflower seeds he and his family of seven were munching. Upon finishing his own seeds, he washed them down with a swig of tea and then, with a deep hawking sound, summoned from his throat a prodigious gob of phlegm, which he casually spat onto the floor in front of us. He then reached out his foot and rubbed the spit into the floor, as if stamping out a cigarette. It was 8:15 A.M., there were fourteen more hours to Beijing, and lots more spittle was loosed throughout that packed compartment before we arrived.

The Communists tried to eradicate spitting when they came to power, in 1949; it was one of their first exhortations to the masses. They failed. Spitting lives on because it is a habit of peasant life, and the vast majority of Chinese are still peasants or only one generation removed. The habit apparently derives from the basic conditions of peasant life, which include rampant lung infections and other respiratory problems. These, in turn, result from a historical fact with enormous environmental implications: for centuries Chinese peasants lived with very little heat in wintertime. They burned wood if they were lucky, but more often they used dried leaves and crop stalks, as Zhenbing remembers his family doing exclusively before he turned ten, in 1976. Today peasants still rely on such “biomass” fuels for 70 percent of their energy consumption.

Coal therefore represents a great advance for the Chinese people; it keeps a body much warmer. But it does so at terrible cost: the Chinese are dying in frightful numbers from coal smoke. Twenty-six percent of all deaths in China are caused by respiratory disease. Coal smoke is not the sole cause of these deaths, but it is a major contributor. Outdoor air pollution, of which coal smoke is the main component, is second only to cigarette smoking as a cause of lung cancer in China’s cities, where lung cancers have increased 18.5 percent since 1988. Coal is also a central element in the “indoor pollution” from home stoves that is the chief cause of rural lung cancers, especially among women.

There is little hope of relief. One of the few natural resources China has in abundance, coal accounts for three quarters of total energy consumption. The country’s power stations and manufacturing plants are fueled overwhelmingly by coal. Factor in coal’s dominant role in keeping people warm, along with the primitive technologies often employed, and it’s no surprise that Chinese cities, especially in the industrial, frigid north, have some of the filthiest air on the planet.

Levels of “total suspended particulates,” or TSP (soot and dust, in lay terms), are appallingly high in China—often four to nine times as high as the World Health Organization’s guideline of 60 to 90 micrograms per cubic meter annually. Most American cities have readings in the 40-to-60 range; New York measures 62. In some northern cities in China the level climbs as high as 400, 500, or even 800 in wintertime.

The Ghosts in Tiananmen Square

VISITORS to Beijing can forget seeing blue skies in winter, except immediately after Siberian winds have roared through. By chance such winds struck the capital the night of my arrival. But two days later the winds calmed, and over the following week and a half I witnessed the sickening descent of the city into murk and gloom.

At noon on my third day, a Saturday, after barely twelve hours of still air, I took a bus across town to a luncheon interview, traveling the main east-west boulevard past Tiananmen Square. Directly above me the sky was still blue, but in the distance a fuzzy pale-gray layer of smog already frosted the skyline. When I came back outside a mere four hours later, the layer had nearly doubled in thickness, its blurry density giving the sky an otherworldly aspect as it melted into a sunset of vivid pinks and yellows. The pollution accumulated with each passing day, and by Thursday I was used to waking up to a dull gray-white haze that rested on the city skyline like a lid on a wok.

On Friday morning I took a taxi to the National People’s Congress. Passing through the larger intersections of Beijing, I looked both ways down the cross streets, but my line of sight extended no farther than about 200 yards. When I reached Tiananmen Square, at 8:45, the sun hung white and barely visible above the southern gate to the Imperial Palace, like a dim light bulb in a barroom full of cigarette smoke. Gazing north, past Mao’s mausoleum and the site of the 1989 massacre, I could not see the far end of the square, much less the Forbidden City beyond it. The pedestrians crossing the square were like spectral figures, half ghost, half flesh, as they disappeared into the gritty mist.

During our travels beyond Beijing, Zhenbing and I fell into a running debate over which city in China had the nastiest air. Was it, in fact, Beijing? Zhenbing, a resident of the capital, wouldn’t entertain the possibility. Was it Benxi, in Manchuria, whose pollution was so thick that in the 1980s the city had vanished from satellite photos? Possibly. Though Benxi was now visible again from outer space, local officials admitted that its TSP levels remained very high. What’s more, my interviews with residents suggested that what progress had been made stemmed as much from widespread factory bankruptcies as from the government’s vaunted cleanup campaign.

For a day I leaned toward Datong, an



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ugly, low-slung town known as China's coal-mining capital. Bad as the air was in Beijing, it was unusual there to see smokestacks belching copious amounts of pure-black smoke; the pollution somehow seemed more dispersed. In Datong black emissions were routine and ubiquitous. Nevertheless, Datong was soon supplanted by Taiyuan, its neighbor to the south. Taiyuan, the provincial capital, was another major coal center that seemed to impose no controls on smokestack emissions. But it had a population of four million, nearly five times that of Datong. Its air was as soupy and gray as a foggy day in London, though there was no natural fog within a hundred miles.

Another formidable competitor was Xi'an, the ancient imperial capital known the world over for the enormous collection of terra-cotta warriors buried outside town. A splendid bell tower and massive city wall dating back to the Ming dynasty further enhance Xi'an's reputation as one of China's loveliest cities. But Xi'an's pollution screened these architectural treasures from view. Even on a sunny day the only sign of the orb itself was a patch of sky somewhat brighter than the rest. As a test I timed how long I could stare at that artificially veiled sun without hurting my eyes. After sixty seconds I stopped counting.

Astonishingly, the Chinese I met insisted that their health is not endangered by all this pollution. I developed a dry, rasping cough because I was a foreigner; they, on the other hand, were "used to it." I heard that phrase dozens of times, even from people who should have known better. One leading environmental scholar and advocate in Beijing, for example, assured me that his lungs could tolerate his daily jogs because he had been breathing Beijing's air for years. By that logic, of course, smoking cigarettes poses no health risk so long as one begins in early childhood. He granted the point, but said that since he could not escape Beijing's air, he at least wanted to be as strong and fit as possible.

The biology of cancer seems to be unknown to many Chinese; even well-educated people appear to be unaware

that the human body cannot build up tolerance against industrial carcinogens the way it can against the infections that cause influenza. But the lack of awareness goes deeper. "A tendency to deny unpleasant realities has become part of the Chinese personality in recent decades," according to Orville Schell, the author of many books on China. "A society that has for decades had to ignore so many unjust and irrational things in order to just get along—the injustices of the gulag, families ruined during the Cultural Revolution, other kinds of government barbarity, the lack of a believable news media—is one in which the capacity to avoid recognizing all sorts of problems, including environmental ones, has become essential to survive," Schell says. In addition, most Chinese accept the familiar idea that economic growth requires environmental damage, and they are quite ready to pay that price. "We have a saying in China," one journalist who has tried to raise public awareness of the subject told me. "Is your stomach too full?" In other words, are you so well off you can afford to complain about nothing? This phrase is used for Americans who talk about saving birds and monkeys while there are still many Chinese people who don't have enough food to eat."

400 Green Chinese

THE environmental movement in China, such as it is, thus faces a daunting challenge. The few individuals who dare to work on the issue say that by necessity education is the top priority. Liang Congjie, the founder and president of Friends of Nature, one of the very few independent environmental groups in China, told me that his organization got permission to operate because it registered as a cultural rather than a political group. He added that with a mere 400 members, "Friends of Nature could never oppose the government directly, the way Greenpeace would—that will not work." Liang focuses instead on raising public consciousness, particularly by prodding Chinese jour-

nalists to cover environmental issues more attentively.

It would be hard to overstate the power that the government-run media exercise in China, so, not surprisingly, Liang was glad to see an increase during the past year in media criticism of environmental problems. Much of that increase has been orchestrated by the government itself, specifically the National Environmental Protection Agency. But there are definite limits to what the official media will say. "In my stories," one journalist told me, "I always have to begin with something positive—how NEPA has announced new policies to protect the air, for example—not with how the pollution got there in the first place and what its exact effects are. So people don't know how bad the situation actually is."

Is it cynical to observe that the Chinese media's newfound interest in environmental issues correlates rather neatly with the environmental crack-down on TVEs that Beijing ordered last summer? The coverage will probably continue as long as the Party keeps pressing the environmental issue, but how long will that be? "The anti-pollution campaign may soon blow over," says Jasper Becker, of the *South China Morning Post*. "The pattern is for such campaigns to come and go, each being replaced by another, and then everyone goes back to doing what they were doing before."

Whose Camel Is It?

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton has said that in his meeting with President Jiang Zemin, in October of 1995, he told Jiang that the biggest security threat China posed to the United States was related not to nuclear weapons or trade agreements but to the environment. Specifically, Clinton worried that China would copy America's bad example while pursuing economic development and end up causing terrible air pollution and global warming. Clinton said he could tell that Jiang "hadn't thought about it just like that." No doubt. Jiang was probably

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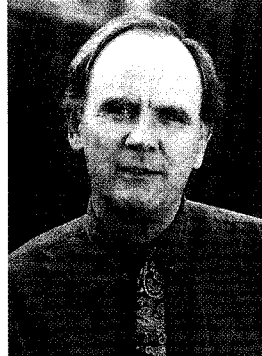
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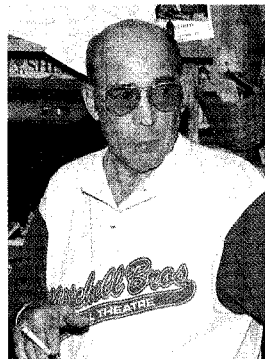
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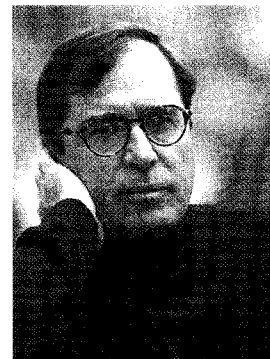
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wondering whether his American counterpart could possibly be serious. If ever there was a non-issue for China's leaders, global warming is it.

"Global warming is not on our agenda," a senior official for the Chongqing Environmental Protection Bureau said with a dismissive wave of his hand when I asked about his agency's strategies to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. As if to underscore his contempt for the issue, the official asserted something he had to know was false—"All the pollution produced in Chongqing is landing here in Chongqing, so it's not a global problem"—before declaring, "We can't start worrying about carbon dioxide until we solve the sulfur dioxide problem." The official was referring to acid rain, which he and his colleagues in China consider more urgent, because acid rain is landing on them and causing tangible damage *today*, whereas carbon-dioxide emissions threaten merely potential, far-off, worldwide damage.

Shortsighted? Yes, but understandable. I arrived in China eager to investigate the issue of climate change, but I almost forgot to raise the point during some interviews. When one is inhaling appallingly polluted air for weeks on end, one tends to focus the questions on that.

China is a greenhouse giant. It has already surpassed the former Soviet Union to become the world's second largest producer of greenhouse gases, trailing only the United States. With its immense coal reserves, huge population, and booming economic growth, China is very likely to triple its greenhouse emissions by 2020. Absent a radical shift in policies elsewhere in the world, that increase will accelerate global climate change, plunging the world into potentially catastrophic territory—melting polar ice caps, raising sea levels, causing more and nastier hurricanes, droughts, and blizzards. China will by no means be immune. Much of its coastline could face severe flooding; perhaps 67 million people could be affected.

Yet China has little patience with Western finger-pointing on the climate-

change issue, regarding it as a cynical means of constraining China's economic development. That is oversensitive, but it contains a kernel of truth. For all its nuclear weapons, grand ambitions, and mobile-phone-wielding, expensively dressed business executives, China remains a poor country where hundreds of millions of people have no reliable supply of electricity. What's more, China emits a far smaller amount of greenhouse gases per capita than the rich nations whose earlier industrialization has already condemned the world to climate change. If outsiders want China to do something about global warming, they will have to pay for it. As one Western consultant with regular access to senior Chinese officials puts it, "They know very well they can hold the world for ransom . . . and whenever they can extract concessions, they will."

"The Americans say China is the straw that breaks the camel's back on greenhouse-gas emissions," says Zhou Dadi, the deputy director general of the State Planning Commission's Energy Research Institute. "But we say, 'Why don't you take some of your heavy load off the camel first?' If the camel belongs to America, fine, we'll walk. But the camel does not belong to America. China will insist on the per capita principle [of distributing emissions rights]. What else are we supposed to do? Go back to no heat in winter? Impossible."

"China is not like Africa, you know—some remote place that's never been developed. We used to be the most developed country in the world. Now, after many decades of turbulence, civil war, revolution, political instability, and other difficulties, we finally have the chance to develop the country again. And we will not lose that chance."

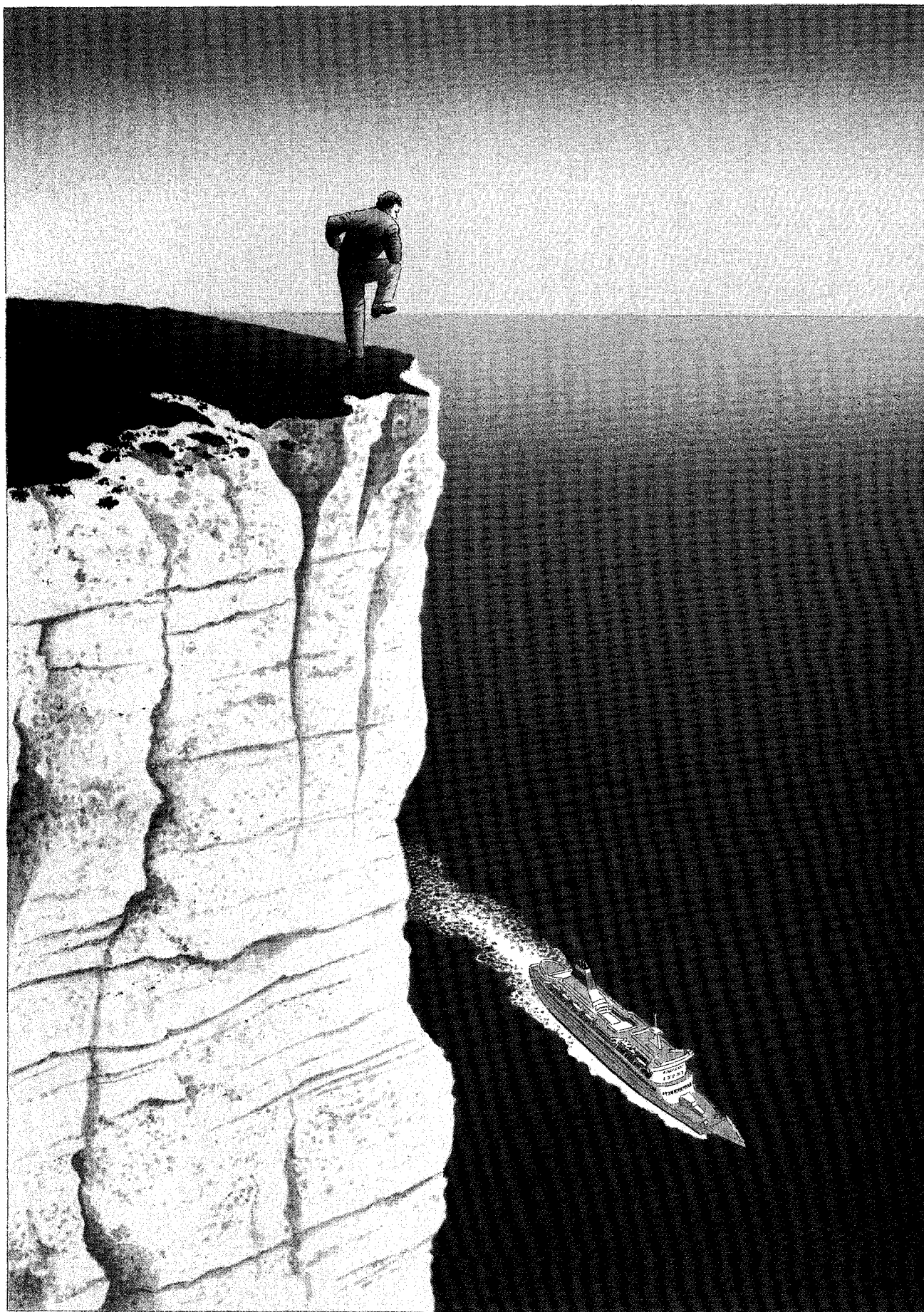
A Terrible Dilemma

TO get rich is glorious, in Deng Xiaoping's famous phrase. Although unrestrained growth can destroy the ecosystems on which all economies ultimately depend, the headlong pursuit of wealth is the cornerstone of modern Chinese life. The

crowning irony is that even China's top environmental officials accept that economic growth must take precedence over environmental protection for years to come. Economic growth is essential not only to maintaining political stability—avoiding a return to the chaos and stagnation seen during the Cultural Revolution—but also to financing the environmental cleanup. "The money will come from the polluter-pays principle," explains Zhang Kunmin, another deputy administrator of the National Environmental Protection Agency. "The enterprises and households must pay the true costs of a cleaner environment, so they need more wealth."

"This is the terrible dilemma of China's environmental crisis," argues a Chinese environmental expert who must remain nameless. "If economic growth stops, people will go back to the old, dirty, cheaper methods of production. Worse, there will be political instability, and that will overshadow everything; in that case no one will have time to worry about the environment. Of course, this rapid economic growth will cause additional environmental damage; some things in the environment are irreversible. That's why I think China will have to lose something—some species, some wetlands, something. We are working very hard to strengthen our environment. But, much as I regret it, you cannot save all the things you would like. You cannot stop a billion people."

It is true: China, and the rest of us, will have to "lose something" in the years ahead. But the scope of that loss matters greatly, and can be influenced. China has made great strides in the past toward the efficient use of energy. With (self-interested) help from the United States and other wealthy nations, a program to install efficient equipment and processes throughout China's energy system could reduce its energy consumption by half. Similar improvements are possible in other areas of environmental policy. But there is no time for delay or half measures. As a government scientist in Chongqing told me, "It is never too late to learn, but it is very late." ☸



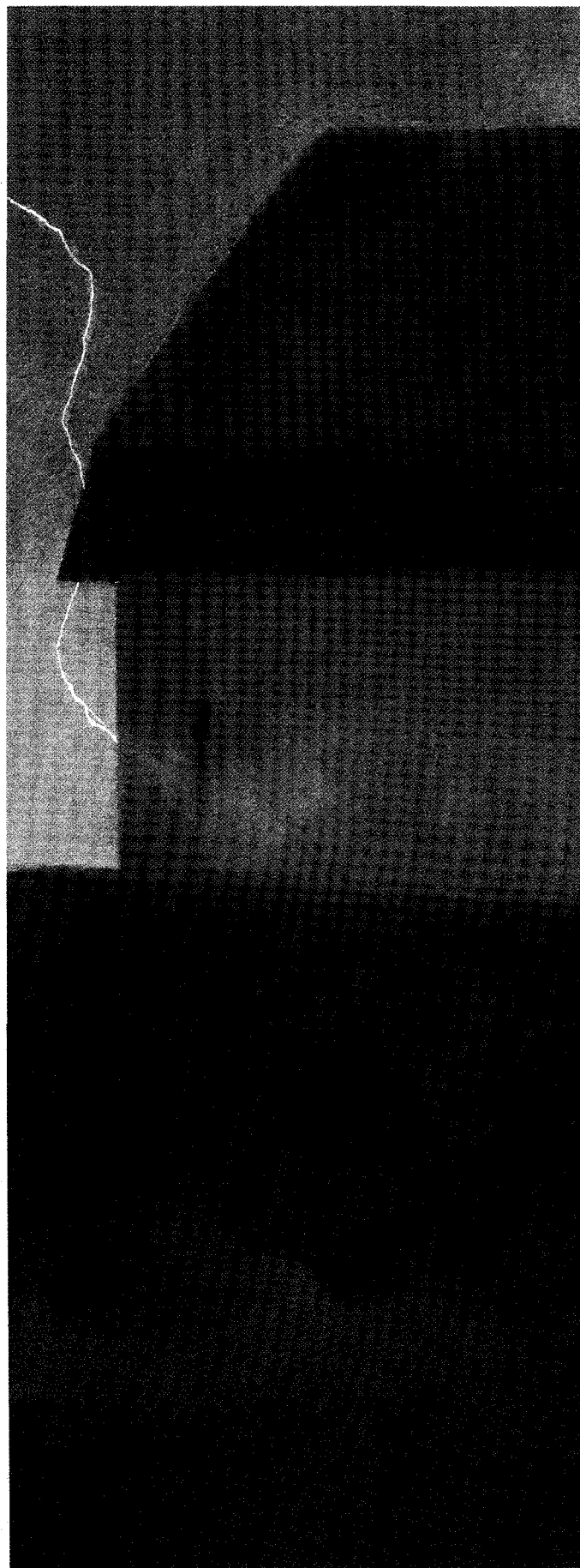
The Half- Skinned Steer

by E. ANNIE PROULX

He said he would be
at the funeral. No point talking
about flights and meeting him at the
airport. He intended to drive.
Of course he knew how far it was.
He had a damn fine car, never
had an accident in his life,
knock on wood

IN the long unfurling of his life, from tight-wound kid hustler in a wool suit riding the train out of Cheyenne to geriatric limper in this spooled-out year, Mero had kicked down thoughts of the place where he began, a so-called ranch on strange ground at the south hinge of the Big Horns. He'd got himself out of there in 1936, had gone to a war and come back, married and married again (and again), made money in boilers and air-duct cleaning and smart investments, retired, got into local politics and out again without scandal, never circled back to see the old man and Rollo, bankrupt and ruined, because he knew they were.

They called it a ranch and it had been, but one day the old man said cows couldn't be run in such tough country, where they fell off cliffs, disappeared into sinkholes, gave up large numbers of calves to marauding lions; where hay couldn't grow but leafy spurge and Canada thistle thrived, and the





wind packed enough sand to scour windshields opaque. The old man wangled a job delivering mail, but looked guilty fumbling bills into his neighbors' mailboxes.

Mero and Rollo saw the mail route as a defection from the work of the ranch, work that consequently fell on them. The breeding herd was down to eighty-two, and a cow wasn't worth more than fifteen dollars, but they kept mending fence, whittling ears and scorching hides, hauling cows out of mudholes, and hunting lions in the hope that sooner or later the old man would move to Ten Sleep with his woman and his bottle and they could, as had their grandmother Olive when Jacob Corn disappointed her, pull the place taut. That bird didn't fly, and Mero wound up sixty years later as an octogenarian vegetarian widower pumping an Exercycle in the living room of a colonial house in Woolfoot, Massachusetts.

One of those damp mornings the nail-driving telephone voice of a woman said she was Louise, Tick's wife, and summoned him back to Wyoming. He didn't know who she was, who Tick was, until she said, Tick Corn, your brother Rollo's son, and that Rollo had passed on, killed by a waspy emu, though prostate cancer was waiting its chance. Yes, she said, you bet Rollo still owned the ranch. Half of it anyway. Me and Tick, she said, we been pretty much running it the past ten years.

An emu? Did he hear right?

Yes, she said. Well, of course you didn't know. You heard of Wyoming Down Under?

He had not. And thought, What kind of name is Tick? He recalled the bloated gray insects pulled off the dogs. This tick probably thought he was going to get the whole damn ranch and bloat up on it. He said, What the hell is this about an emu? Were they all crazy out there?

That's what the ranch is called now, she said. Wyoming Down Under. Rollo'd sold the place way back when to the Girl Scouts, but one of the girls was dragged off by a lion, and the GSA sold out to the Banner ranch, next door, which ran cattle on it for a few years and then unloaded it on a rich Australian businessman, who started Wyoming Down Under, but it was too much long-distance work and he'd had bad luck with his manager, a feller from Idaho with a pawnshop rodeo buckle, so he'd looked up Rollo and offered to swap him a half interest if he'd run the place. That was back in 1978. The place had done real well. Course we're not open now, she said. It's winter and there's no tourists. Poor Rollo was helping Tick move the emus to another building when one of them turned on a dime and come right for him with its big razor claws. Emus is bad for claws.

I know, he said. He watched the nature programs on television.

She shouted, as though the telephone lines were down all across the country, Tick got your number off the computer. Rollo always said he was going to get in touch. He wanted

you to see how things turned out. He tried to fight it off with his cane, but it laid him open from belly to breakfast.

Maybe, he thought, things hadn't finished turning out. Impatient with this game, he said he would be at the funeral. No point talking about flights and meeting him at the airport, he told her; he didn't fly, a bad experience years ago with hail, the plane had looked like a waffle iron when it landed. He intended to drive. Of course he knew how far it was. Had a damn fine car, Cadillac, always drove Cadillacs, Gislaved tires, interstate highways, excellent driver, never had an accident in his life, knock on wood. Four days; he would be there by Saturday afternoon. He heard the amazement in her voice, knew she was plotting his age, figuring he had to be eighty-three, a year or so older than Rollo, figuring he must be dotting around on a cane, too, drooling the tiny days away—she was probably touching her own faded hair. He flexed his muscular arms, bent his knees, thought he could dodge an emu. He would see his brother dropped in a red Wyoming hole. That event could jerk him back; the dazzled rope of lightning against the cloud is not the downward bolt but the compelled upstroke through the heated ether.

HE had pulled away at the sudden point when the old man's girlfriend—now he couldn't remember her name—seemed to have jumped the track, Rollo goggling at her bloody bitten fingers, nails chewed to the quick, neck veins like wires, the outer forearms shaded with hairs, and the cigarette glowing, smoke curling up, making her wink her bulging mustang eyes, a teller of tales of hard deeds and mayhem. The old man's hair was falling out, Mero was twenty-three and Rollo twenty, and she played them all like a deck of cards. If you admired horses, you'd go for her with her arched neck and horsy buttocks, so high and haunchy you'd want to clap her on the rear. The wind bellowed around the house, driving crystals of snow through the cracks of the warped log door, and all of them in the kitchen seemed charged with some intensity of purpose. She'd balanced that broad butt on the edge of the dog-food chest, looking at the old man and Rollo, now and then rolling her glossy eyes over at Mero, square teeth nipping a rim of nail, sucking the welling blood, drawing on her cigarette.

The old man drank his Everclear stirred with a peeled willow stick for the bitter taste. The image of him came sharp in Mero's mind as he stood at the hall closet contemplating his hats. Should he take one for the funeral? The old man had had the damndest curl to his hat brim, a tight roll on the right where his doffing or donning hand gripped it, and a wavering downslope on the left like a shed roof. You could recognize him two miles away. He wore it at the table listening to the woman's stories about Tin Head, steadily emptying his glass until he was nine times nine drunk, his gang-

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stery face loosening, the crushed rodeo nose and scar-crossed eyebrows, the stub ear, dissolving as he drank. Now he must be dead fifty years or more, buried in the mailman sweater.

THE girlfriend started a story, Yeah, there was this guy named Tin Head down around Dubois when my dad was a kid. Had a little ranch, some horses, cows, kids, a wife. But there was something funny about him. He had a metal plate in his head from falling down some cement steps.

Plenty of guys has them, Rollo said in a challenging way.

She shook her head. Not like his. His was made out of galvy, and it eat at his brain.

The old man held up the bottle of Everclear, raised his eyebrows at her: Well, darlin'?

She nodded, took the glass from him, and knocked it back in one swallow. Oh, that's not gonna slow *me* down, she said.

Mero expected her to neigh.

So what then, Rollo said, picking at the horse manure under his boot heel. What about Tin Head and his galvanized skull plate?

I heard it this way, she said. She held out the glass for another shot of Everclear, and the old man poured it, and she went on.

MERO had thrashed all that ancient night, dreamed of horse breeding or hoarse breathing, whether the act of sex or bloody, cutthroat gasps he didn't know. The next morning he woke up drenched in stinking sweat, looked at the ceiling, and said aloud, It could go on like this for some time. He meant cows and weather as much as anything, and what might be his chances two or three states over in any direction. In Woolfoot, riding the Exercycle, he thought the truth was somewhat different: he'd wanted a woman of his own, not the old man's leftovers.

What he wanted to know now, tires spanking the tar-filled road cracks and potholes, funeral homburg sliding on the back seat, was if Rollo had got the girlfriend away from the old man, thrown a saddle on her, and ridden off into the sunset.

THE interstate, crippled by orange cones, forced traffic into single lanes, broke his expectation of making good time. His Cadillac, boxed between semis with hissing air brakes, showed snuffling huge rear tires in the windshield, framed a looming Peterbilt in the back window. His thoughts clogged as if a comb working through his mind had stuck against a snarl. When the traffic eased and he tried

to cover some ground, the highway patrol pulled him over. The cop, a pimpled, moustached specimen with mismatched eyes, asked his name, where he was going. For the minute he couldn't think what he was doing there. The cop's tongue dapped at the scraggy moustache while he scribbled.

Funeral, he said suddenly. Going to my brother's funeral.

Well, you take it easy, gramps, or they'll be doing one for you.

You're a little polecat, aren't you? he said, staring at the ticket, at the pathetic handwriting, but the moustache was a mile gone, peeling through the traffic as Mero had peeled out of the ranch road that long time ago, squinting through the abraded windshield. He might have made a more graceful exit, but urgency had struck him as a blow on the humerus sends a ringing jolt up the arm. He believed it was the horse-haunched woman leaning against the chest and Rollo fixed on her, the old man swilling Everclear and not noticing or, if noticing, not caring, that had worked in him like a key in an ignition. She had long, gray-streaked braids; Rollo could use them for reins.

YEAH, she said, in her low and convincing liar's voice. I'll tell you, on Tin Head's ranch things went wrong. Chickens changed color overnight, calves was born with three legs, his kids was piebald and his wife always crying for blue dishes. Tin Head never finished nothing he started, quit halfway through a job every time. Even his pants was half buttoned, so his wienie hung out. He was a mess with the galvy plate eating at his brain, and his ranch and his family was a mess. But, she said, they had to eat, didn't they, just like anybody else?

I hope they eat pies better than the ones you make, said Rollo, who didn't like the mouthful of pits that came with the chokecherries.

HIS interest in women had begun a few days after the old man had said, Take this guy up and show him them Ind'an drawrings, jerking his head at the stranger. Mero had been eleven or twelve at the time, no older. They rode along the creek and put up a pair of mallards who flew downstream and then suddenly reappeared, pursued by a goshawk who struck the drake with a sound like a handclap. The duck tumbled through the trees and into deadfall trash, and the hawk shot away as swiftly as it had come.

They climbed through the stony landscape, limestone beds eroded by wind into fantastic furniture, stale gnawed bread crusts, tumbled bones, stacks of dirty folded blankets, bleached crab claws and dog teeth. He tethered the horses in the shade of a stand of limber pine and led the anthropologist up through the stiff-branched mountain mahogany to the

overhang. Above them reared corroded cliffs brilliant with orange lichen, pitted with holes, ridged with ledges darkened by millennia of raptor feces.

The anthropologist moved back and forth scrutinizing the stone gallery of red and black drawings: bison skulls, a line of mountain sheep, warriors carrying lances, a turkey stepping into a snare, a stick man upside-down dead and falling, red-ocher hands, violent figures with rakes on their heads that he said were feather headdresses, a great red bear dancing forward on its hind legs, concentric circles and crosses and latticework. He copied the drawings in his notebook, saying Rubba-dubba a few times.

That's the sun, said the anthropologist, who resembled an unfinished drawing himself, pointing at an archery target, ramming his pencil into the air as though tapping gnats. That's an atlatl, and that's a dragonfly. There we go. You know what this is, and he touched a cloven oval, rubbing the cleft with his dusty fingers. He got down on his hands and knees and pointed out more, a few dozen.

A horseshoe?

A horseshoe! The anthropologist laughed. No, boy, it's a vulva. That's what all of these are. You don't know what this is, do you? You go to school on Monday and look it up in the dictionary.

It's a symbol, he said. You know what a symbol is?

Yes, said Mero, who had seen them clapped together in the high school marching band. The anthropologist laughed

and told him he had a great future, gave him a dollar for showing him the place. Listen, kid, the Indians did it just like anybody else, he said.

He had looked the word up in the school dictionary, slammed the book closed in embarrassment, but the image was fixed for him (with the brassy background sound of a military march), blunt ocher tracing on stone, and no fleshly examples ever conquered his belief in the subterranean stony structure of female genitalia, the pubic bone a proof, except for the old man's girlfriend, whom he imagined down on all fours, entered from behind and whinnying like a mare, a thing not of geology but of flesh.

THURSDAY night, balked by detours and construction, he was on the outskirts of Des Moines. In the cinder-block motel room he set the alarm, but his own stertorous breathing woke him before it rang. He was up at five-fifteen, eyes aflame, peering through the vinyl drapes at his snow-hazed car flashing blue under the motel sign, SLEEP SLEEP. In the bathroom he mixed the packet of instant motel coffee and drank it black, without ersatz sugar or chemical cream. He wanted the caffeine. The roots of his mind felt withered and punky.

A cold morning, light snow slanting down: he unlocked the Cadillac, started it, and curved into the vein of traffic, all semis, double and triple trailers. In the headlights' glare he missed the westbound ramp and got into torn-up muddy streets, swung right and right again, using the motel's SLEEP sign as a landmark, but he was on the wrong side of the interstate, and the sign belonged to a different motel.

Another mudholed lane took him into a traffic circle of commuters sucking coffee from insulated cups, pastries sliding on dashboards. Half around the hoop he spied the interstate entrance ramp, veered for it, collided with a panel truck emblazoned STOP SMOKING! HYPNOSIS THAT WORKS!, was rammed from behind by a stretch limo, the limo in its turn rear-ended by a yawning hydroblast operator in a company pickup.

He saw little of this, pressed into his seat by the air bag, his mouth full of a rubbery, dusty taste, eyeglasses cutting into his nose. His first thought was to blame Iowa and those who lived in it. There were a few round spots of blood on his shirt cuff.

A star-spangled Band-Aid over his nose, he watched his crumpled car, pouring dark fluids onto the highway, towed away behind a wrecker. When the police were through with him, a taxi took him, his suitcase, the homburg funeral hat, in the other direction, to Posse Motors, where lax salesmen drifted like disorbited satellites and where he bought a secondhand Cadillac, black like the wreck but three years older and the upholstery not cream leather but sun-faded velour.

CHILDLESSNESS

For many years I wanted a child
though I knew it would only illuminate life
for a time, like a star on a tree; I believed
that happiness would at last assert itself,
like a bird in a dirty cage, calling me,
ambassador of flesh, out of the rough
locked ward of sex.

Outstretched on my spool bed,
I am like a groom, alternately seeking fusion
with another and resisting engulfment by it.
A son's love for his mother is like a river
dividing the continent to reach the sea:
I believed that once. When you died, Mother,
I was alone at last. And then you came back,
dismal and greedy like the sea, to reclaim me.

—HENRI COLE

He had the good tires from the wreck brought over and mounted. He could do that if he liked, buy cars like packs of cigarettes and smoke them up. He didn't care for the way the Caddy handled out on the highway, throwing itself abruptly aside when he twitched the wheel, and he guessed it might have a bent frame. Damn. He'd buy another for the return trip. He could do what he wanted.

He was half an hour past Kearney, Nebraska, when the full moon rose, an absurd visage balanced in his rearview mirror, above it a curled wig of a cloud, filamented edges like platinum hairs. He felt his swollen nose, palped his chin, tender from the stun of the air bag. Before he slept that night, he swallowed a glass of hot tap water enlivened with whiskey, crawled into the damp bed. He had eaten nothing all day, but his stomach coiled at the thought of road food.

He dreamed that he was in the ranch house but all the furniture had been removed from the rooms and in the yard troops in dirty white uniforms fought. The concussive reports of huge guns were breaking the window glass and forcing the floorboards apart, so that he had to walk on the joists. Below the disintegrating floors he saw galvanized tubs filled with dark, coagulated fluid.

On Saturday morning, with four hundred miles in front of him, he swallowed a few bites of scorched eggs, potatoes painted with canned salsa verde, a cup of yellow coffee, left no tip, got on the road. The food was not what he wanted. His breakfast habit was two glasses of mineral water, six cloves of garlic, a pear. The sky to the west hulked sullen; behind him were smears of tinselly orange shot through with blinding streaks. The thick rim of sun bulged against the horizon.

He crossed the state line, hit Cheyenne for the second time in sixty years. He saw neon, traffic, and concrete, but he knew the place, a railroad town that had been up and down. That other time he had been painfully hungry, had gone into the restaurant in the Union Pacific station although he was not used to restaurants, and had ordered a steak. When the woman brought it and he cut into the meat, the blood spread across the white plate and he couldn't help it, he saw the beast, mouth agape in mute bawling, saw the comic aspects of his revulsion as well, a cattleman gone wrong.

Now he parked in front of a phone booth, locked the car although he stood only seven feet away, and telephoned the number Tick's wife had given him. The ruined car had had a phone. Her voice roared out of the earpiece.

We didn't hear so we wondered if you changed your mind.

No, he said, I'll be there late this afternoon. I'm in Cheyenne now.

The wind's blowing pretty hard. They're saying it could maybe snow. In the mountains. Her voice sounded doubtful.

I'll keep an eye on it, he said.

He was out of town and running north in a few minutes.

The country poured open on each side, reduced the Cadillac to a finger snap. Nothing had changed, not a Goddamn thing, the empty pale place and its roaring wind, the distant antelope as tiny as mice, landforms shaped true to the past. He felt himself slip back; the calm of eighty-three years sheeted off him like water, replaced by a young man's scalding anger at a fool world and the fools in it. What a damn hard time it had been to hit the road. You don't know what it was like, he had told his wives, until they said they did know, he'd pounded it into their ears two hundred times, the poor youth on the street holding up a sign asking for work, the job with the furnace man, *yatata yatata ya*. Thirty miles out of Cheyenne he saw the first billboard: WYOMING DOWN UNDER, Western Fun the Other Way, over a blown-up photograph of kangaroos hopping through the sagebrush and a blond child grinning in a manic imitation of pleasure. A diagonal banner warned, Open May 31.

SO what, Rollo had said to the old man's girlfriend, what about that Mr. Tin Head? Looking at her, not just her face but up and down, eyes moving over her like an iron over a shirt and the old man in his mailman's sweater and lopsided hat tasting his Everclear and not noticing or not caring, getting up every now and then to lurch onto the porch and water the weeds. When he left the room, the tension ebbed and they were only ordinary people to whom nothing happened. Rollo looked away from the woman, leaned down to scratch the dog's ears, saying Snarleyow Snapper, and the woman took a dish to the sink and ran water on it, yawning. When the old man came back to his chair, the Everclear like sweet oil in his glass, glances resharpened and inflections of voice again carried complex messages.

Well, well, she said, tossing her braids back, every year Tin Head butchers one of his steers, and that's what they'd eat all winter long, boiled, fried, smoked, fricasseed, burned, and raw. So one time he's out there by the barn, and he hits the steer a good one with the ax, and it drops stun down. He ties up the back legs, hoists it up and sticks it, shoves the tub under to catch the blood. When it's bled out pretty good, he lets it down and starts skinning it, starts with the head, cuts back of the poll down past the eye to the nose, peels the hide back. He don't cut the head off but keeps on skinning, dew-claws to hock, up the inside of the thigh and then to the cod and down the middle of the belly to brisket. Now he's ready to start siding, working that tough old skin off. But siding is hard work (the old man nodded) and he gets the hide off about halfway and starts thinking about dinner. So he leaves the steer half-skinned there on the ground and he goes into the kitchen, but first he cuts out the tongue, which is his favorite dish all cooked up and eat cold with Mrs. Tin Head's mustard in a forget-me-not teacup. Sets it on the ground and

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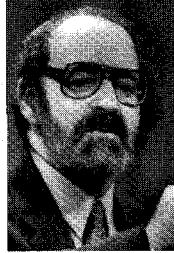
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goes in to dinner. Dinner is chicken and dumplings, one of them changed-color chickens started out white and ended up blue, yessir, blue as your old daddy's eyes.

She was a total liar. The old man's eyes were murk brown.

O NTO the high plains sifted the fine snow, delicately clouding the air, a rare dust, beautiful, he thought, silk gauze, but there was muscle in the wind rocking the heavy car, a great pulsing artery of the jet stream swooping down from the sky to touch the earth. Plumes of smoke rose hundreds of feet into the air, elegant fountains and twisting snow devils, shapes of veiled Arab women and ghost riders dissolving in white fume. The snow snakes writhing across the asphalt straightened into rods. He was driving in a rushing river of cold whiteout foam. He could see nothing; he trod on the brake, the wind buffeting the car, a bitter, hard-flung dust hissing over metal and glass. The car shuddered. And as suddenly as it had risen, the wind dropped and the road was clear; he could see a long, empty mile.

How do you know when there's enough of anything? What trips the lever that snaps up the STOP sign? What electrical currents fizz and crackle in the brain to shape the decision to quit a place? He had listened to her damn story and the dice had rolled. For years he believed he had left without hard reason and suffered for it. But he'd learned from television nature programs that it had been time for him to find his own territory and his own woman. How many women were out there! He had married three of them and sampled plenty.

W ITH the lapping subtlety of an incoming tide the shape of the ranch began to gather in his mind; he could recall sharply the fences he'd made, taut wire and perfect corners, the draws and rock outcrops, the watercourse valley steepening, cliffs like bones with shreds of meat on them rising and rising, and the stream plunging suddenly underground, disappearing into a subterranean darkness of blind fish, shooting out of the mountain ten miles west on a neighbor's place but leaving their ranch some badland red country as dry as a cracker, steep canyons with high caves suited to lions. He and Rollo had shot two early in that winter, close to the overhang with the painted vulvas. There were good caves up there from a lion's point of view.

H E traveled against curdled sky. In the last sixty miles the snow began again. He climbed out of Buffalo. Pallid flakes as distant from one another as galaxies flew past, then more, and in ten minutes he was crawling at twenty miles an hour, the windshield wipers thumping like a stick dragged down the stairs.

The light was falling out of the day when he reached the pass, the blunt mountains lost in snow, the greasy hairpin turns ahead. He drove slowly and steadily in a low gear; he had not forgotten how to drive a winter mountain. But the wind was up again, rocking and slapping the car, blotting out all but whipping snow, and he was sweating with the anxiety of keeping to the road, dizzy with the altitude. Twelve more miles, sliding and buffeted, before he reached Ten Sleep, where streetlights glowed in revolving circles like Van Gogh's sun. There had not been electricity when he left the place. In those days there were seventeen black, lightless miles between the town and the ranch, and now the long arch of years compressed into that distance. His headlights picked up a sign: 20 MILES TO WYOMING DOWN UNDER. Emus and bison leered above the letters.

He turned onto the snowy road, marked with a single set of tracks, faint but still discernible, the heater fan whirring, the radio silent, all beyond the headlights blurred. Yet everything was as it had been, the shape of the road achingly familiar, sentinel rocks looming as they had in his youth. There was an eerie dream quality in seeing the deserted Farrier place leaning east as it had leaned sixty years ago, and the Banner ranch gate, where the companionable tracks he had been following turned off, the gate ghostly in the snow but still flying its wrought-iron flag, unmarked by the injuries of weather, and the taut five-strand fences and dim shifting forms of cattle. Next would come the road to their ranch, a left-hand turn just over the crest of a rise. He was running now on the unmarked road through great darkness.

W I N K I N G at Rollo, the girlfriend had said, Yes, she had said, Yes, sir, Tin Head eats half his dinner and then he has to take a little nap. After a while he wakes up again and goes outside, stretching his arms and yawning, says, Guess I'll finish skinning out that steer. But the steer ain't there. It's gone. Only the tongue, laying on the ground all covered with dirt and straw, and the tub of blood and the dog licking at it.

It was her voice that drew you in, that low, twangy voice, wouldn't matter if she was saying the alphabet, what you heard was the rustle of hay. She could make you smell the smoke from an imagined fire.

H O W could he not recognize the turnoff to the ranch? It was so clear and sharp in his mind: the dusty crimp of the corner, the low section where the snow drifted, the run where willows slapped the side of the truck. He went a mile, watching for it, but the turn didn't come up; then he watched for the Bob Kitchen place, two miles beyond, but the distance unrolled and there was nothing. He made a

three-point turn and backtracked. Rollo must have given up the old entrance road, for it wasn't there. The Kitchen place was gone to fire or wind. If he didn't find the turn, it was no great loss; back to Ten Sleep and scout a motel. But he hated to quit when he was close enough to spit, hated to retrace black miles on a bad night when he was maybe twenty minutes away from the ranch.

He drove very slowly, following his tracks, and the ranch entrance appeared on the right, although the gate was gone and the sign down. That was why he'd missed it, that and a clump of sagebrush that obscured the gap.

He turned in, feeling a little triumph. But the road under the snow was rough and got rougher, until he was bucking along over boulders and slanted rock and knew wherever he was, it was not right.

He couldn't turn around on the narrow track and began backing gingerly, the window down, craning his stiff neck, staring into the redness cast by the taillights. The car's right rear tire rolled up over a boulder, slid, and sank into a quaggy hole. The tires spun in the snow, but he got no purchase.

I'll sit here, he said aloud. I'll sit here until it's light and then walk down to the Banner place and ask for a cup of coffee. I'll be cold but I won't freeze to death. It played like a joke the way he imagined it, with Bob Banner opening the door and saying, Why, it's Mero, come on in and have some java and a hot biscuit, before he remembered that Bob Banner would have to be 120 years old to fill that role. He was maybe three miles from Banner's gate, and the Banner ranch house was another seven miles beyond the gate. Say a ten-mile hike at altitude in a snowstorm. On the other hand, he had half a tank of gas. He could run the car for a while, turn it off, start it again, all through the night. It was bad luck, but that's all. The trick was patience.

He dozed half an hour in the wind-rocked car, woke shivering and cramped. He wanted to lie down. He thought perhaps he could put a flat rock under the Goddamn tire. Never say die, he said, feeling around the passenger-side floor for the flashlight in his emergency bag, and then remembering the wrecked car towed away, the flares and car phone and AAA card and flashlight and matches and candle and power bars and bottle of water still in it, and probably now in the damn tow driver's damn wife's car. He might get a good enough look anyway in the snow-reflected light. He put on his gloves and buttoned his coat, got out and locked the car, sidled around to the rear, bent down. The taillights lit the snow beneath the rear of the car like a fresh bloodstain. There was a cradle-sized depression eaten out by the spinning tire. Two or three flat ones might get him out, or small round ones—he was not going to insist on the perfect stone. The wind tore at him; the snow was certainly drifting up. He began to shuffle on the road, feeling with his feet for rocks

he could move, the car's even throbbing promising motion and escape. The wind was sharp and his ears ached. His wool cap was in the damn emergency bag.

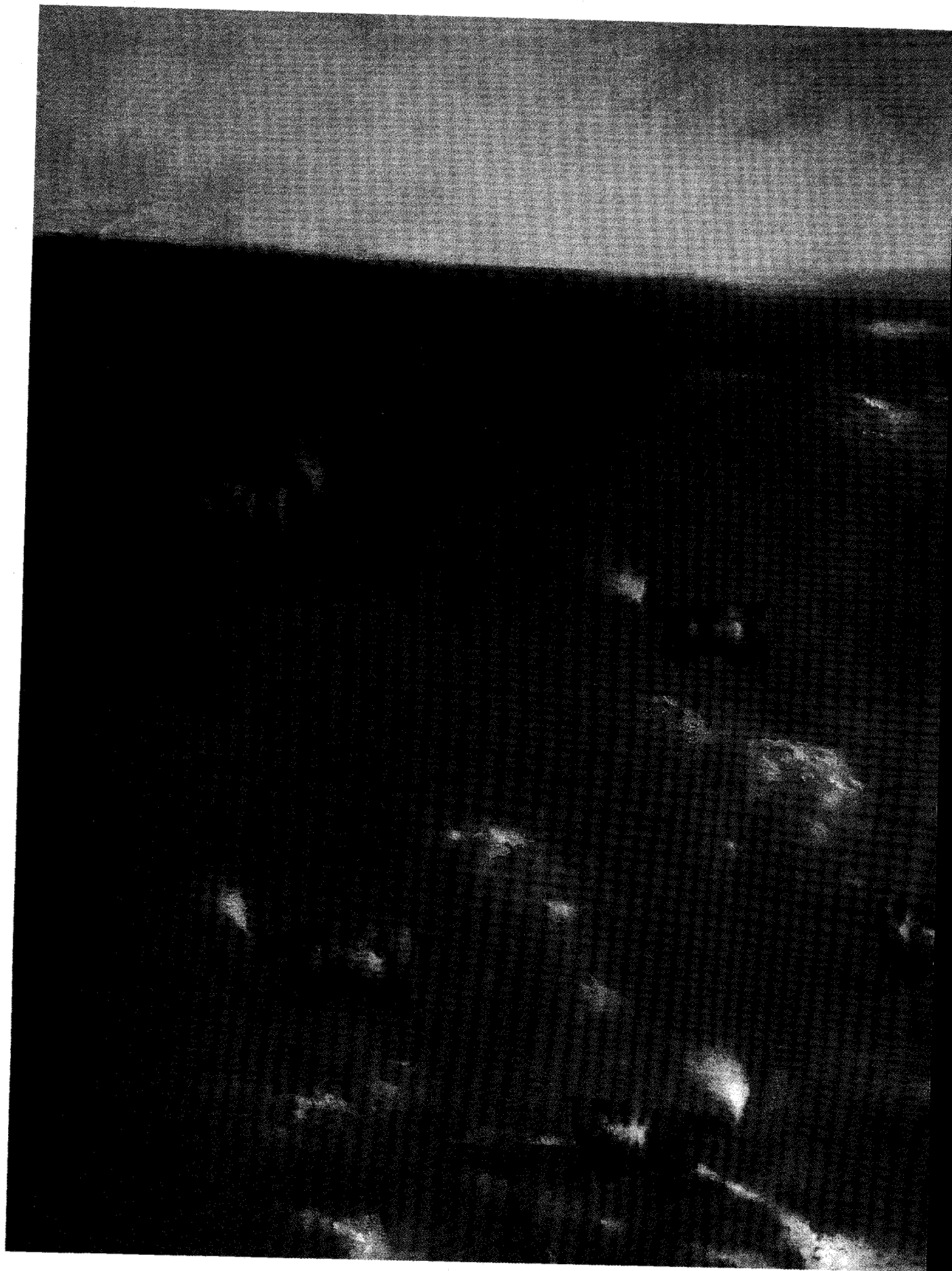
MY Lord, she continued, Tin Head is just startled to pieces when he don't see that steer. He thinks somebody, some neighbor, don't like him, plenty of them, come and stole it. He looks around for tire marks or footprints but he don't see nothing except old cow tracks. He puts his hand up to his eyes and stares away. Nothing in the north, the south, the east, but way over there in the west, on the side of the mountain, he sees something moving stiff and slow, stumbling along. It looks raw and it's got something bunched and wet hanging down over its hindquarters. Yeah, it was the steer, never making no sound. And just then it stops and it looks back. And all that distance Tin Head can see the raw meat of the head and the shoulder muscles and the empty mouth without no tongue open wide and its red eyes glaring at him, pure teetotal hate like arrows coming at him, and he knows he is done for and all of his kids and their kids is done for, and that his wife is done for and that every one of her blue dishes has got to break, and the dog that licked the blood is done for, and the house where they lived has to blow away or burn up and every fly or mouse in it.

There was a silence and she added, That's it. And it all went against him too.

That's it? Rollo said in a greedy, hot way.

YET he knew he was on the ranch, he felt it, and he knew this road, too. It was not the main ranch road but some lower entrance he could not quite recollect that cut in below the river. Now he remembered that the main entrance gate was on a side road that branched off well before the Banner place. He found another good stone, another, wondering which track this could be; the map of the ranch in his memory was not as bright now, but scuffed and obliterated as though trodden. The remembered gates collapsed, fences wavered, while the badland features swelled into massive prominence. The cliffs bulged into the sky, lions snarled, the river corkscrewed through a stone hole at a tremendous rate, and boulders cascaded from the heights. Beyond the barbed wire something moved.

He grasped the car-door handle. It was locked. Inside, by the dashboard glow, he could see the gleam of the keys in the ignition where he'd left them to keep the car running. The situation was almost comic. He picked up a big two-hand rock, smashed it on the driver's-side window, and slipped his arm in through the hole, into the delicious warmth of the car, a contortionist's reach, twisting behind the steering wheel and down, and had he not kept limber with exercise and





nut cutlets and green leafy vegetables he could never have reached the keys. His fingers grazed and then grasped, and he had them. This is how they sort out the men from the boys, he said aloud. As his fingers closed on the keys, he glanced at the passenger door. The lock button stood high. And even had it been locked as well, why had he strained to reach the keys when he had only to lift the lock button on the driver's side? Cursing, he pulled out the rubber floor mats and arranged them over the stones, stumbled around the car once more. He was dizzy, tremendously thirsty and hungry, opened his mouth to snowflakes. He had eaten nothing for two days but the burned eggs that morning. He could eat a dozen burned eggs now.

The snow roared through the broken window. He put the car in reverse and slowly trod the gas. The car lurched and steadied in the track, and once more he was twisting his neck, backing in the red glare, twenty feet, thirty, but slipping and spinning; the snow was too deep. He was backing up an incline that had seemed level on the way in but now showed itself as a remorselessly long hill, studded with rocks and deep in snow. His incoming tracks twisted like rope. He forced out another twenty feet, spinning the tires until they smoked, and then the rear wheels slued sideways off the track and into a two-foot ditch, the engine died, and that was it. He was almost relieved to have reached this point where the celestial fingernails were poised to nip his thread. He dismissed the ten-mile distance to the Banner place: it might not be that far, or maybe they had pulled the ranch closer to the main road. A truck might come by. Shoes slipping, coat buttoned awry, he might find the mythical Grand Hotel in the sagebrush.

ON the main road his tire tracks showed as a faint pattern in the pearly apricot light from the risen moon, winking behind roiling clouds of snow. His blurred shadow strengthened whenever the wind eased. Then the violent country showed itself, the cliffs rearing at the moon, the snow rising off the prairie like steam, the white flank of the ranch slashed with fence cuts, the sagebrush glittering, and along the creek black tangles of willow, bunched like dead hair. Cattle were in the field beside the road, their plumed breath catching the moony glow like comic-strip dialogue balloons.

His shoes filled with snow, he walked against the wind, feeling as easy to tear as a man cut from paper. As he walked, he noticed that one from the herd inside the fence was keeping pace with him. He walked more slowly, and the animal lagged. He stopped and turned. It stopped as well, huffing vapor, regarding him, a strip of snow on its back like a linen runner. It tossed its head, and in the howling, wintry light he saw he'd been wrong again, that the half-skinned steer's red eye had been watching for him all this time. ☼

THE READING WARS

by NICHOLAS LEMANN



An old disagreement over how to teach children to read—whole-language versus phonics—has re-emerged in California, in a new form. Previously confined largely to education, the dispute is now a full-fledged political issue there, and is likely to become one in other states

DURING the 1980s the idea of raising standards in public education emerged as a national cause and as an establishing issue for a certain kind of centrist politician. It provided a chance to demonstrate that the liberal impulse to offer opportunity to all and the conservative impulse to demand high performance could be joined. Among the people who used education reform to get onto the national stage were Bill and Hillary Clinton, in Arkansas, and Ross Perot, who was the head of a state commission on the subject, in Texas.

None of these people, however, could claim to be the

most prominent neoliberal education reformer in the country. That position belonged to the superintendent of public instruction in California, Bill Honig, who was in charge of by far the biggest state school system in America, with a student population of more than five million. Honig was operating at a higher level of ambition—for the schools, if not for himself—than the other state superintendents, because he wanted not merely to make teachers and students submit to tests of competence but to change what was taught. A privileged idealist from San Francisco, tall, skinny, and enthusiastic to the point of obsession, Honig worked tirelessly

to convert the California curriculum into an immersion in great books and ideas. The rumor was that he was thinking about running for governor in 1990.

Honig had made a lot of enemies, though, and he had a spectacular fall: he was indicted, tried, and convicted of having given state funds to an education foundation on whose board his wife sat. That wasn't the end of him. As energetic in exile as he had been in power, Honig threw himself into the study of elementary-grade instruction. He concluded that under his direction many of the policies of the state education department had been terribly mistaken; he publicly disowned them, and started an organization to undo what he had done only a few years earlier. One Sacramento lobbyist I spoke with on a recent trip to California sardonically called him "the Robert McNamara of reading."

The policy that caused Honig's recantation was whole-language reading instruction, which was practically unknown in the lay population five years ago but now, amazingly, has become a big political issue in California. In each of the past three years California legislators have passed bills designed to force the state's public schools to move the needle in reading instruction away from whole-language and toward its archenemy—the phonics method. The view in the education world is that politicians have never before tried to dictate specific teaching methods to this extent. Phonics forces are agitating for similar laws in other states, and in California a related movement is pushing to establish political control over mathematics instruction as well.

Quite often in public disputes one finds that the controversy is on the surface and secretly the parties mostly agree (Medicare reform is a good example). The dispute over reading instruction is just the opposite: in California everybody now claims allegiance to a "balanced approach" incorporating whole-language and phonics, but the truth is that the two sides have one of the purest and angriest disagreements I've ever encountered. "We're in the midst of a huge war," one California state legislator told me. "This is worse than abortion," another of the combatants somewhat gleefully reported.

The dispute operates at three levels, which is one reason why it is so pervasive. It concerns how people learn, what schools should be for, and the essential nature of a good society.

A JOYFUL ALTERNATIVE TO DEADENING DRILLS

WHOLE-language theory holds that learning to read and write English is analogous to learning to speak it—a natural, unconscious process best fostered by unstructured immersion. In an atmosphere rich in simple printed texts and in reading aloud, small children make a wondrous associative leap from knowing the alphabet to be-

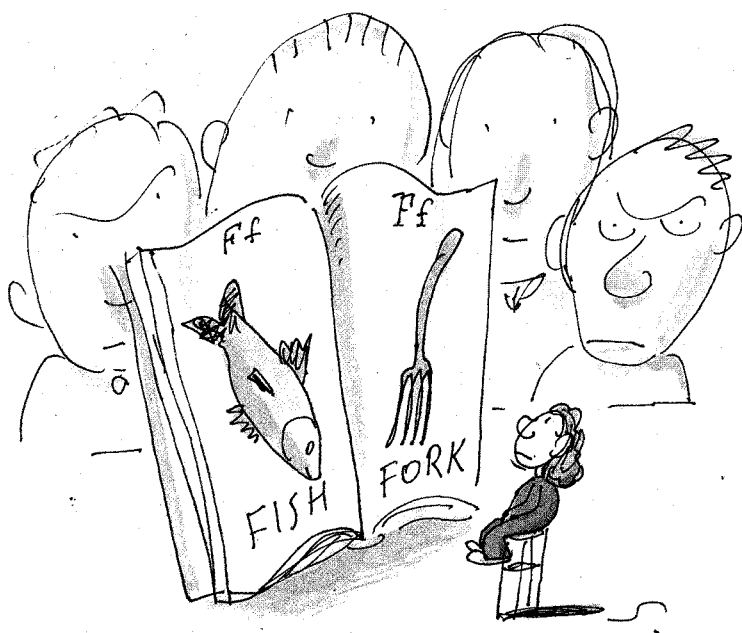
ing able to read whole words. Their minds receive print as if each word were a Chinese ideogram. If a word is unfamiliar it can be skipped, guessed at, or picked up from context. Phonics theory takes exactly the opposite position: the proper analogy for learning to read is learning music notation, or Morse code, or Braille, in which mastery of a set of symbols comes first. Children should first learn the letters and letter combinations that convey the English language's forty-four sounds; then they can read whole words by decoding them from their component phonemes. "Sounding out" words is a phonics, rather than a whole-language, technique.

Although the whole-language movement began in the early 1970s, the dispute about reading instruction goes back much further. Noah Webster believed in phonics, Horace Mann in the word method. In the late 1920s, as progressive education became an influential movement, schools began to switch from phonics to whole-word reading instruction. The much-lampooned mid-twentieth-century Dick and Jane readers, and also Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat*, are based on whole-word theory: they try to get children to familiarize themselves with a limited set of simple words (to memorize them, phonics people would say, like trick ponies), not to use their knowledge of letters and sounds to decode words they haven't seen before. Rudolf Flesch's scorching 1955 best seller *Why Johnny Can't Read* turned the pendulum back toward phonics in the 1960s. By the 1980s, the glory decade for whole-language, the pendulum had swung again.

The founders of whole-language, Frank Smith, for many years a professor of psychology at the University of Victoria, in British Columbia, and Kenneth Goodman, a professor of education at the University of Arizona, see themselves as champions of teachers who are up against a hostile world. They present whole-language instruction as a joyful, humanistic, intellectually challenging alternative to deadening phoneme drills—one that turns the classroom from a factory floor into a nurturing environment in which children naturally blossom. Phonics instructors heatedly dispute the idea that learning phonemes is dull. Nancy Ichinaga, the principal of an elementary school in the Los Angeles area that uses a phonics-based reading program, told me, "It's like learning a code; we like learning a secret code. They like breaking the code. It's just a mind and world expansion for them." Nonetheless, the juxtaposition of joyous whole-language learning and boring phonics is at the heart of the whole-language ethos. In his 1986 book about reading instruction, *Insult to Intelligence* (the first three words of which are "Meet the enemy"), Smith wrote, "That learning requires effort is another myth." One member of the California state board of education, a phonics man who is married to a third-grade teacher, described the appeal of whole-language to teachers this way: "It's easier to teach whole-language. We had large class sizes, thirty kids. You're a teacher, and you're told, 'Just read to them, and they'll get it.' What a saving grace!"

The whole-language camp is hostile to the idea that scores on standardized tests of reading skills are the best way to measure quality of education. Frank Smith presents tests as commercial America's means for turning teachers into spirit-crushing personnel trainers (and ultimately replacing them with computers), rather than allowing them to impart true knowledge and intellectual independence. It's no wonder that many teachers who love children, who love reading, who feel underpaid and unappreciated, and who are intellectually ghettoized are attracted to whole-language.

The specific vehicle for the spread of whole-language through American public education was a program called Reading Recovery, developed by a teacher in New Zealand named Marie Clay, which supposedly produced nearly miraculous results with third- and fourth-graders who were having trouble reading. Reading Recovery itself draws upon both phonics and whole-language theory, but in America it



has served as a transmission device for whole-language. Reading Recovery specifically, and whole-language reading instruction generally, spread like wildfire through the education world during the 1980s.

Rudolf Flesch, in tracing the roots of the word method he found so alarming, identified Jean-Jacques Rousseau as the original culprit. He was right: a profound disagreement over whether freedom or discipline brings out the best in people underlies the debate over reading instruction (and also over math instruction, in which the math-concepts camp wants to do away with times tables and long division). In a slightly different context Frank Smith writes, "The difference between the two sides was not one that evidence or argument could ever resolve. The difference was one of world view." From the other side of the current divide Marilyn Jager Adams, a leading phonics advocate, agrees: how best to teach reading, she writes, "may be the most politicized topic in the field of

education." Although many people are for phonics simply because they believe it works better, phonics is also a long-standing cause of the political right; in a number of communities it is one of the main organizing issues for the Christian Coalition. Whole-language is generally a cause of the left.

EDUCATION trends have three means of transmission, all invisible to the public: the sale of textbooks and other instructional materials, teaching in schools of education, and teacher-training seminars conducted during the paid noninstructional days that are provided in teachers' contracts. As superintendent in California, Honig realized that he couldn't directly affect what was taught in schools of education, because they are independent of the state board of education, and so if he wanted to have any real influence over what went on in public-school classrooms, the best means at hand were textbooks and seminars. He moved aggressively to put his people in charge both of setting up California's eight annual "staff development" days for teachers and of writing state subject-matter "frameworks," which form the basis for textbook orders.

It is a sign of how recondite the debate over reading instruction then was that Honig, a former elementary school teacher and the head of the public school system in the largest state, had never heard of whole-language. The bulk of reading instruction, on which nearly all subsequent learning is based, should be over by the end of second grade. Most of it takes place in first grade, which even in the unglamorous field of elementary education stands out as an unglamorous and not very desirable assignment for a teacher. Even professionals like Honig, and parents who consider themselves to be greatly concerned about their children's education, have tended to focus on high school and to assume that not much can go wrong

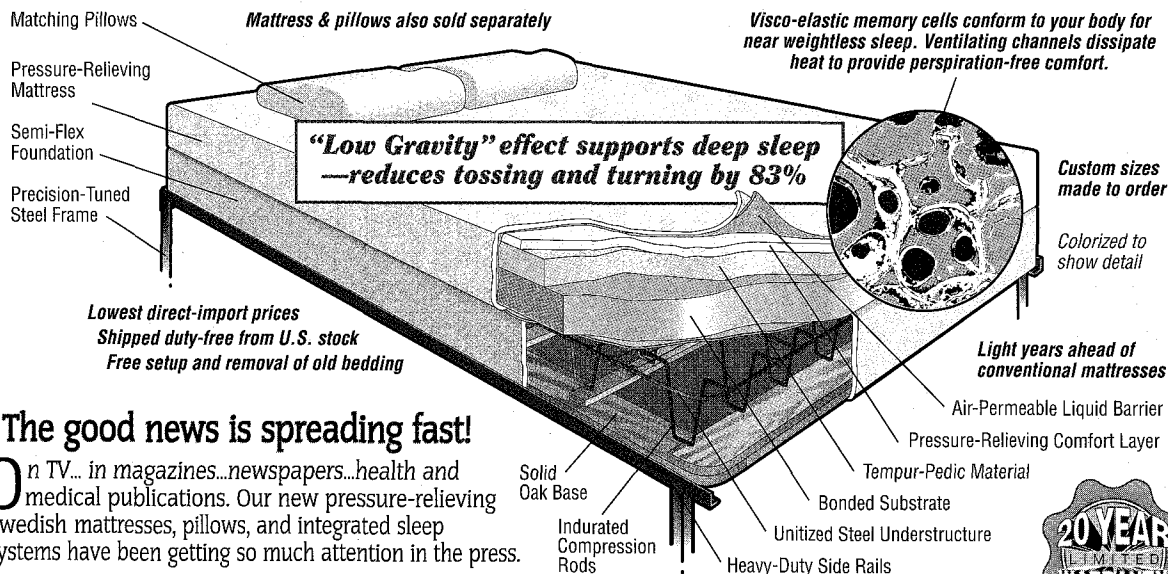
in the world of angelic six-year-olds.

The dispute on which Honig focused when he was superintendent was the one getting the most mainstream attention—the "culture wars" between great-books advocates and multiculturalists. Honig took the great-books side, and pushed California schools hard to teach the classics of literature and history. (For example, although he is a liberal Democrat, Honig brought in Diane Ravitch, who was an official in the Bush Administration, in addition to being one of the country's most prominent authorities on education, to work on California's history frameworks.)

When it came time to develop frameworks for early-grade reading instruction, in 1986, Honig convened a large meeting of experts. As he listened to the whole-language people speak, Honig heard that they wanted not mindless drills but to instill in children a reverence for reading. "We thought we were pushing literature," he told me recently. "We were

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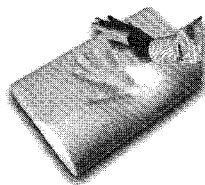


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neutral on phonics. Then the whole-language movement hijacked what we were doing.”

Before Honig noticed what was going on, California made a strong commitment to whole-language. In 1987 a committee he had appointed formulated a new “English-Language Arts” framework. This would appear to the uninitiated reader to be a collection of bland platitudes, but someone who knows how to interpret the code phrases would understand that it opened the way to a wholesale abandonment of phonics instruction. The framework made possible the victory of whole-language textbooks in the battle for California’s business, which is so important that it influences the way all American textbooks are written. The teacher-training system took a sharp turn toward whole-language. In 1990 Governor George Deukmejian canceled California’s standardized test of basic skills, which had shown steadily rising reading scores, saying that he objected to its being funded from general state revenues. The cancellation was widely interpreted as having more to do with a long-running feud between Deukmejian and Honig. Honig responded by formulating another of his ambitious plans, which was to have the understaffed state department of education construct a pathbreaking new test, rather than simply buying a standard one from a commercial test publisher. Thus whole-language’s early years took place in a test-score vacuum.

WHY MARION JOSEPH’S GRANDSON COULDN’T READ

AT this point the main character in the story became a woman named Marion Joseph, who likes to present herself as an example of that classic California type, the little old lady in tennis shoes turned amateur politician. That is only superficially accurate. Joseph is seventy years old and short and operates out of a suburban ranch house in

Menlo Park, but she worked for many years in the state education bureaucracy in Sacramento and is superbly well connected in the legislature and in school districts around the state. Joseph met Bill Honig in 1965, when he was a junior aide to Governor Pat Brown. She came to regard him, she told me recently, as a younger brother. But in 1982 she stopped speaking to him, because of the tenor of his successful campaign for the office of superintendent of public instruction, in which he defeated her boss, Wilson Riles. (Honig framed the contest as one of competence against incompetence in a way that hurt and offended Joseph.) After the campaign Joseph and her husband spent a few years running a nursery in Marin County that purveyed high-end English perennials, herbs, and vegetables. The demands of her business, along with her estrangement from Honig, meant that she was not keeping abreast of California education during the years when whole-language came in.

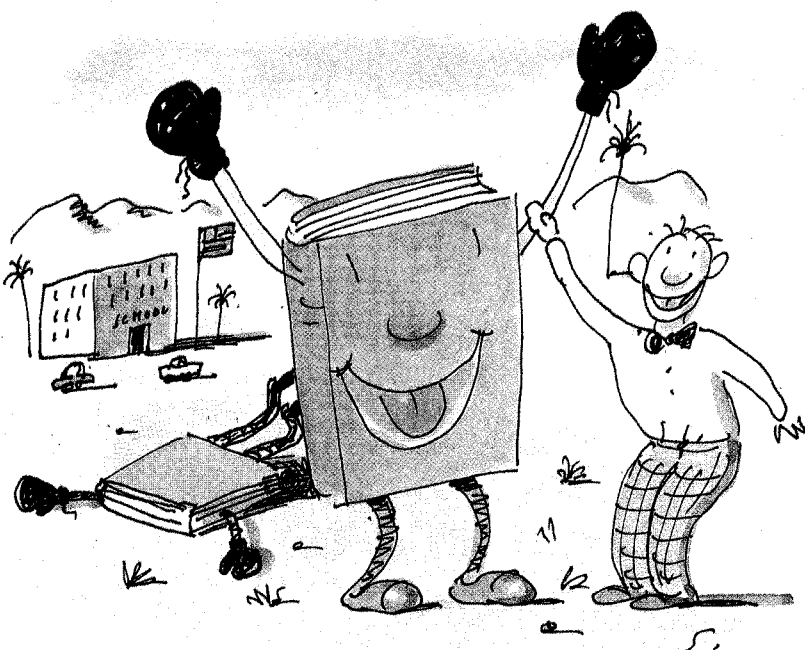
One fateful day in 1989 Joseph’s daughter called to say she was sick and needed someone to fill in for her at the open house for parents at her first-grader’s school in San Leandro. Joseph went and heard her grandson’s teacher give a twenty-minute presentation about reading instruction. Joseph told me, “I came home and said to myself, ‘I don’t understand a single word she said in the whole twenty minutes.’” Later in the school year her daughter moved to Modesto and enrolled her son in school there; she went to see his teacher and asked to see a copy of the instructional materials in reading so that she could help him learn. She was shown an anthology filled with long passages that her son had no way of figuring out how to read.

Joseph went on with the story: “So I started calling my contacts all over the state, and I asked this question: ‘Is there a problem with the implementation of the new language-arts curriculum?’ They all said yes, every one of them. At this point I’d never heard the term ‘whole-language.’ I kept

trying to find out what the problem was. I went to a meeting of curriculum experts. I asked, ‘Is there a problem?’ A woman who was there just hit the ceiling, and when she came down, she said, ‘You must be one of those phonics nuts!’”

One day while she was driving home, Joseph happened to hear an interview on National Public Radio with Reid Lyon, the head of the development and behavior branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Lyon was describing research he had supervised that demonstrated the necessity of phonics instruction as a prelude to actual reading. Joseph pulled off the freeway, found a pay phone, and called him up.

Reid Lyon is a nightmare figure for the whole-language movement, because he has the means to fund large, scientifically reputable studies of read-



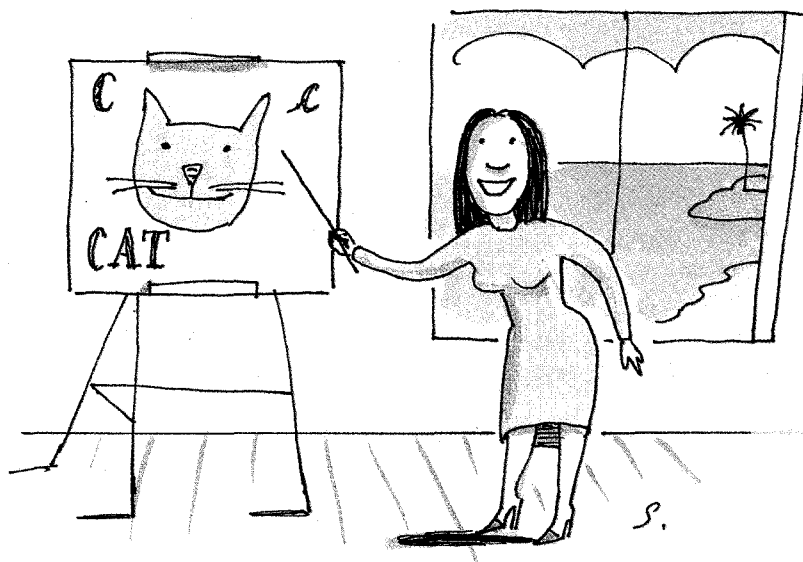
ing-instruction methods, the results of which have made him into a wholehearted and very public opponent of dropping phonics. A new study of 285 children in a poor neighborhood in Houston, for example, shows those who were taught the forty-four phonemes first to be 10 percentage points ahead of those taught in accordance with whole-language theory on a reading-comprehension test. The whole-language forces have studies of their own (Frank Smith has asserted baldly that phonics “just does not work”), but, as Lyon often points out, these studies haven’t been successfully replicated.

After being briefed by Lyon, Joseph decided that the time had come to start speaking to Bill Honig again. She went to see him in Sacramento and laid out the case against whole-language. He said he’d think about it. Joseph, who is nothing if not relentless, set up a second meeting and made the sale. By this time Honig was deeply into his downfall, and could not do anything about reading instruction. Once he had been ousted, though, Honig plunged into the issue of reading instruction with his customary limitless energy. He met everybody and read everything and wound up as a phonics zealot (though he would describe himself as a balanced-approach zealot). When he gets on the subject of learning to read, words pour out of him in a great rush: names, anecdotes, phone numbers, Internet addresses, book titles, journal-article citations, theories about brain function. He is a man on fire. In 1995 he started an organization called the Consortium on Reading Excellence, and began lobbying state and local officials all over the country to abandon whole-language.

SOBERING SCORES

AT first the tide was still running against Joseph and Honig. In 1992, culminating a process Honig had initiated, the state board of education adopted a new set of mathematics frameworks that, like the language-arts frameworks of 1987, represented a strong shift of emphasis away from the acquisition of basic skills. The currents began to shift a year later, when the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a long-running federal study, released for the first time state-by-state comparisons of reading proficiency. California finished fifth from the bottom, among the Deep South states that always come in last in national surveys. Three years later a new set of NAEP scores was published, showing that California’s reading scores had dropped to next to last, ahead of only Guam’s.

California’s new state reading test, administered in 1993 and 1994, was a political disaster. Passages about oppression, taken from the work of Alice Walker among other writers, generated furious opposition from the right, and Governor



Pete Wilson canceled the test in 1994. But it had been administered, so the scores were released. Like the NAEP scores, they showed disastrously low levels of reading proficiency: 77 percent of fourth-graders were below their grade level.

By the time the shocking scores were coming out, the Republican sweep in the 1994 elections had given California a Republican-majority state assembly for the first time in years—and, in Wilson, a presidentially ambitious Republican governor who had won a come-from-behind re-election campaign by running as a confrontational conservative. For the first time ever in California politics the elementary school curriculum became a political issue.

The consensus was that embracing whole-language had been a huge mistake. The newly elected state superintendent of public instruction, Delaine Eastin, quickly distanced herself from whole-language (“Good people do believe in alchemy at various points in our history,” she told me recently, by way of explaining its adoption) and set up task forces on reading and math that wound up recommending more emphasis on phonics and computational skills. In Palo Alto and San Diego angry and well-organized parents’ groups, made up substantially of engineers and scientists, emerged to combat the new math frameworks. In the fall of 1995 the legislature passed, without a single dissenting vote in either house, two bills mandating the use of instructional materials that teach reading through phonics and math through “basic computational skills.” It also set up a commission to create comprehensive statewide academic standards, which would then become the basis for new textbooks and tests.

Last year Governor Wilson, strongly prodded by his adviser on elementary education, Maureen DiMarco, who is another late convert to phonics, proposed an annual budget containing \$100 million for skills-based reading and mathematics instruction. During the spring and summer of last year the reading issue took off. A Republican legislator from

outside San Diego, Steve Baldwin, a former aide to Newt Gingrich who has the mischievous, troublemaking quality and the fascination with ideas that the young Gingrich had, held a dramatic hearing on the failings of whole-language; the repentant Honig was lead witness. Marion Joseph began working the legislature full time, drawing on her experience as a lobbyist for the state education department.

By that September the legislature had passed seven separate reading bills with a total authorization of nearly a billion dollars; among other things, they reduced class size in the early grades to a maximum of twenty, directed funds from the federal Goals 2000 program toward supporting phonics instruction, and funded phonics training for teachers. Wilson began filling the state board of education with phonics advocates (including, recently, Marion Joseph). The board decided not to re-adopt the leading whole-language textbook for use in California. The state board of education set up a new math-frameworks committee, on which members of the back-to-skills parent groups in Palo Alto and San Diego are well represented. The California state university system, which educates teachers, set up a new center, headed by a retired state senator, to make sure that the system's graduates would be trained in how to teach phonics.

This year the legislature passed another reading bill, providing more than \$50 million to train teachers in phonics instruction for grades four through eight. The bill establishes much tighter central control over the choice of training companies for the state's staff-development contracts in reading; Marion Joseph had heard from her sources around the state that the new training programs were being hijacked by the whole-language forces, and she lobbied to have that changed. Next year may bring more bills, particularly if the math-skills movement feels that the new math frameworks do not undo everything it objects to. Honig and Joseph do not appear to think that their work is done either. "As long as Marion's around," one former legislator told me, "there will be more legislation."

THE PHONICS TEST

WHOLE-language is being made to bear a very large load of blame—all the blame, essentially, for what is wrong in public education in California. The mythos of the state holds that public institutions, including freeways, law-enforcement agencies, and universities as well as public schools, have fallen in just one generation from a state of grace during which they worked much better than their equivalents back east and formed the foundation of a casual, open, efficient, democratic society. Terrible reading scores also tap into the large reservoir of emotion about the decline of reliable government as the basis of a good society in California. Real fury has been directed at whole-language.

If elementary schools were ever golden, a great deal more

than whole-language is responsible for their not being so anymore. During the 1970s first the "revenue limits" policy of Ronald Reagan's governorship and then Proposition 13 severely reduced school funding in California. In 1965 the state was fifth in the nation in per capita funding; now it is thirty-seventh. Class sizes mushroomed. Immigration filled the schools with non-English-speakers. Public school libraries in the state now have three books per child, when eighteen is the standard nationwide. "The thing that troubles me is, What if it wasn't whole-language?" says Jerry Hayward, a veteran California educator who co-directs a policy-research organization in Sacramento. "What if it was the teachers? Or the textbooks? Or class size? Or money?"

The next few sets of NAEP results should settle the question, though if California scores go up, it will be difficult to tell how much of the increase is owing to phonics and how much to class-size reduction, which has received the great bulk of the new funding. Certainly, whole-language has been isolated. Support for it is limited to an enclosed community of devotees, including teachers, education-school professors, textbook publishers, bilingual educators, and teacher trainers. Virtually no one in the wider public seems to be actively promoting whole-language. No politicians are crusading for it. Of the major teachers' unions, the American Federation of Teachers is a wholehearted opponent and the National Education Association is neutral. No independent scientific researchers trumpet whole-language's virtues. The balance of parental pressure is not in favor of whole-language. (In contrast, parents are supporting out of their own pockets a private phonics industry, consisting of instructional materials like "Hooked on Phonics" and the computer program Reader Rabbit, and after-school tutoring operations like Score and Kumon.)

With apologies for being another national reporter who has gone to California and seen America's future, I'd like to offer three predictions arising from the California curriculum wars. First, efforts to establish greater quality control in public education, which will almost inevitably mean trying to impose more central authority over the advanced countries' most decentralized system of schooling, will go on constantly over the next few decades. Second, given that the traditional side is now winning the ongoing battle between traditional and progressive education, schools all over the country will be pressed hard by parents and politicians to move toward imparting skills and away from simply inculcating the joy of learning. Third, the longer the United States remains in its current peaceful and relatively prosperous condition, the more issues like school curricula, which politicians and the press aren't used to considering at any length, will come to the fore in American politics. Politics can be contentious and consequential without being about the adjudication of world affairs. Great clashes of ideas and interests can take place on the battleground of everyday life. ☞



THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Chessboard

Answers to the "Board" clues are to be entered *two* letters (in consecutive pairs) to a square. Answers to the "Pieces" clues are to be entered one letter per square, starting in the squares indicated by the clue numbers and then proceeding in appropriate chess moves. Pawns (P) move in straight lines either up or down the board. Rooks (R) move up, down, or sideways, turning at right angles. Knights (Kn) trace two L shapes beyond their starting squares, twice moving two nondiagonal steps in one direction followed by one step to the side. Bishops (B) move on the diagonal. Kings (K) and queens (Q) are free to move up, down, sideways, or diagonally. "Pieces" clues alternate between the first player's moves (each of which ends in a different top-row square) and the second player's moves (each of which ends in a different bottom-row square). The top and bottom rows will consist of eight letters each, spelling out the players' names. Because all the other squares contain two letters, you must decide which of each pair to use for a "Pieces" answer. (Every letter derived from a "Board" word is used, once, by a "Pieces" word.) Answers include three capitalized words.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56
57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 162.

Board

- a. First of squares on board is secure (35, 26, 54)
- b. Make error in box (37, 47, 39)
- c. Outdoor diners choose pants in conversation (38, 41, 9, 14, 18)
- d. Sing an "E"—that's nice (25, 51, 10)
- e. Empty cup turned brownish purple (11, 20)
- f. Hesitating to own jewelry (50, 28, 42, 32)
- g. Go north for raise (43, 55, 31)
- h. Ground or a vista for pilots (30, 23, 16, 13)
- i. Network identified in game show (29, 15)
- j. A sleazy newspaper covering part of Spain (53, 45, 17)

- k. Silk stocking was shocking when viewed in return footpath (33, 22, 44, 34)
- l. Mail charges got passe, oddly (40, 19, 49, 24)
- m. Sources of vexation for troop's top brasses (21, 12, 27)
- n. Announced markdown for boating gear (36, 46)
- o. Waiter, almost gone, taking bow (52, 48, 56)

Pieces

- P33. Great surprise from small pawn (5)
- Kn45. Party received knight (7)
- Q19. Badly strain a queen (7)
- K35. King involved in identical deception (4,4)

- R48. Ponder faction right behind rook (8)
- B15. Infiltration of bishop's domain by knight's supporter (7)
- Kn20. Russian writer in check, off in the audience (7)
- R11. Bag of bananas matron ate up (11)
- K35. Roman magistrates kid during songs (8)
- Kn40. Saw rover in lead (7)
- B46. Leo packs gun smoothly (6)
- P36. Exchange backhands? (4)
- R30. Eve's vicar twisted the other way around (4,5)
- B19. Episodic story of grain recited (6)
- B41. Makes a lot of money from tips put in coffee container (6,2)
- Q54. Godzilla nearly buries street (4)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.



Redeeming the Rake

*Stravinsky's The Rake's Progress
is purposely hard to love—which is why it
so amply rewards those who stay for the
glorious third act*

IGOR Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* is one of a handful of operas that I can sing beginning to end from memory—not that anyone would want to hear me do it. It has held a special place in my affections ever since high school, when I came upon the one recording that existed at the time, with the composer conducting. I didn't actu-

ally see the opera until my senior year in college—but that was not my fault. The opera world has never shared my love for

The Rake. Until a new production opens this season, it will not have been performed by the Metropolitan Opera Company since its inaugural performances, in 1953.

My assessment of this work will prob-

ably strike most opera fans as perverse. It reflects the fact that I came to know operas from listening to records and studying scores rather than from seeing them in the theater. My opera experience produced its own form of snobbery. From my earliest exposure to the genre I was drawn to Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*, Berg's *Wozzeck*, and Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, but not at all to Verdi, Puccini, or Strauss. Let the masses eat steak—I just wanted caviar. Those austere monuments of modern opera flattered my younger self, making me feel wise beyond my years. I still adore *The Rake's Progress*, and one of its scenes still brings tears to my eyes, but I can also see why the opera audience finds it off-putting. Like many operas, it is deeply flawed, confused, and contradictory. Its style is inconsistent. Its characters are wooden. Its moral is all too obvious. These are no reasons not to love it and perform it.

In broad outline *The Rake's Progress* seems soulless and idea-driven. The story of its creation shows that the composer and the librettists were perhaps too self-conscious about producing a modern masterpiece. Stravinsky saw an exhibit of Hogarth's series of paintings in Chicago in 1947 and immediately decided to give the subject an operatic form. Aldous Huxley suggested W. H. Auden as librettist. The project thus brought together the world's most famous composer and the third most famous poet (after T. S. Eliot and Robert Frost) in the English language. The celebrity of the creative team helped to sell the opera for three glamorous world premieres in three languages. Auden wrote Stravinsky that their collaboration would be the greatest honor of his life; he also brought in his friend Chester Kallman as co-librettist. Kallman was an opera fan and a poet, and Auden's faithless lover—a model Rake.

Despite notable differences in their personal lives and backgrounds, Auden and Stravinsky shared many artistic preoccupations that attracted them to the subject matter. Eighteenth-century London was a natural setting for Stravinsky's neoclassical style—he had been writing pseudo-eighteenth-century music since *Pulcinella*, in 1920. The sleaze-crowded urban vignettes of Hogarth's pictures were in tune with Auden's poetic world of the time, as shown in his *The Age of Anxiety* (1947), an extended closet drama set in wartime New York bars and taxicabs. Stravinsky had just composed an austere Mass, and Auden had returned to the Anglican Church. They shared the pessimistic social perspective implied by the paintings, whose subtext could well be, to use the words of Samuel Johnson, a contemporary of Hogarth's, the vanity of human wishes. Put these elements together, however, and you get the offensive *Rake's Progress*: an overextended musical pastiche, an overly clever libretto, and a grim view of human nature.

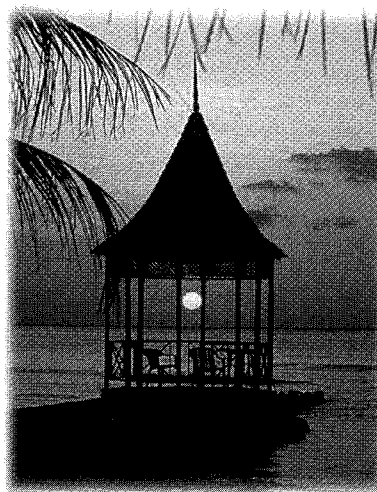
IN some ways the reality is even worse than this. Stravinsky's delight in reviving old operatic forms worked wonders in the first act but ran out of steam in the second. The overture of the opera recalls Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, the opening scene echoes Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and the dazzling cabaletta at the end of the

act is an homage to "Sempre libera," from Verdi's *La Traviata*. Here Stravinsky demonstrated his genius for speaking through the mannerisms of other composers while always sounding like himself. But as the dramatic line lost itself in plot exposition, he could not sustain the charade. In the second act the pastiches begin to sound like stuff that Mozart and Verdi would have thrown into the trash.

Auden and Kallman's libretto, which often matches the music in its ability to sound both modern and "period," seems overloaded with moral machinery. Not content simply to retell Hogarth's tale of a young man—here called Tom Rake-well—who deserts his girlfriend, Anne Trulove, for the temptations of London, only to end in Bedlam, the librettists added several new elements: Tom is lured to London by a Mephistophelian tempter, Nick Shadow, who will act as his servant, his wages to be paid in a year and a day. Tom's descent into depravity is articulated in three fairy-tale wishes. These begin simply with his wish for money but become more philosophically sophisticated—and more obscure.

Auden and Kallman used the eighteenth-century setting to lampoon trendy twentieth-century ideas. Soon jaded by wealth, Tom wishes for freedom, and Nick convinces him that he will be free only if he performs an existential "*acte gratuit*," like the murder committed by Camus's stranger. So Tom marries Baba the Turk, a bearded lady. But she soon bores him too, and he dreams that he can both feed the masses and make himself rich with a machine that turns stones, or even crockery, into bread. Having taken aim at existentialism, the librettists targeted materialism: Tom's fantasy parodies the ambitions of England's postwar socialist government and also the pipe dreams of get-rich-quick American capitalism—too clever by half. Both Baba and the bread machine have proved virtually impossible to bring convincingly to the stage, leaving the opera with a second act that limps from one ineffective scene to the next. Directors have tried to undo the damage by staging the opera in two acts rather than three, splitting the weak second act in two to hide its weaknesses, or cutting much of it altogether—a move that further confused whatever dramatic thread the story originally had.

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FORTUNATELY, though, this paper *Rake*, so neat and unpleasant, is not what you encounter in the theater, especially if you stay for the third act—one of the most perfect and most moving in all opera. There are three scenes: a hilarious auction (the one real developed ensemble number in an opera overloaded with solos), a graveyard card game in which Tom gambles for his soul, and a wrenching conclusion in which Anne visits Tom in Bedlam. These encompass comedy, dramatic tension, and lyrical pathos—and they seem to have nothing to do with the situations or characters in the previous act. Baba the Turk, about to be sold off as an apparently dead curiosity, stops the auction and shows herself to be not a freak of nature but a generous and motherly theater goddess—like Roseanne when her character shows what a good mom she really is. Baba urges Anne to save Tom even though he is just a “shuttle-headed lad.” (Actually, until this point he has seemed more an intolerable cad than a dashing rake.)

In the graveyard scene Tom finally stops whining about how boring his life is and reveals the true wellsprings of his character: a proper Christian terror of the eternal damnation he has brought upon himself, and a transcendent vision of the only force that might save him—love, the power he has been running away from for the entire opera. Winning the card game by outwitting the Devil, Tom attains insanity rather than damnation, the insanity of a Kierkegaardian believer trapped in the modern world. In Bedlam he is no longer the Rake but calls himself Adonis and speaks like a mythological poet. His redemption comes in the form of a lullaby sung by Anne—a tune you might walk out of this opera humming.

I think *The Rake's Progress* redeems itself in Act III because it moves into its own Bedlam—opera land, a world that in its halfhearted modernist way it has so far resisted. We will not be sentimental (à la Verdi) or sensational (à la Strauss) or emotionally manipulative (à la Puccini), the creators appear to have tacitly agreed. But these manifestations of good taste have little to do with the compelling elements in the opera—which are precisely sentimental, sensational, and manipulative. How else to describe Baba's unexpected humanity, the dramatic contrivance of the card game, the

surrounding of Anne's lullaby with a chorus of madmen? These unexpected descents into vulgarity bring the opera to life and reveal its true emotional center. Not surprisingly, this center springs from the personal experiences of its composer and librettists.

In Bedlam, Tom calls out for Orpheus and Persephone, the mythological subjects of two Stravinsky ballets. The reference feels like an emotional identification rather than an in-joke. But how could the shallow, passive Tom stand in for Stravinsky? Perhaps Nick Shadow is a version of Diaghilev, who transformed Stravinsky from an unknown provincial composer into an international celebrity and also a rootless cosmopolitan, like Tom. Mother Goose's tawdry brothel could then recall the debauched atmosphere of the Ballets Russes. Anne, too good to be true, combines elements of Stravinsky's two wives: Catherine, his plain, pious cousin, whom he married when he was still a student; and the glamorous Vera de Bosset, who became his mistress in 1922 and whom he married in 1940, a year after Catherine's death. With Vera, Stravinsky achieved an idyllic second life in Hollywood, itself a kind of Bedlam. Anne's lullaby is an emblem of their domestic bliss, which Stravinsky may have felt redeemed him after the guilt-ridden dual-household existence he led in France between the wars.

Auden and Kallman, too, brought their personal histories to the opera. Auden met the stunningly handsome eighteen-year-old Kallman in 1939 and decided immediately that he had found the man of his dreams. But Kallman really was a rake, sexually incompatible with Auden and endlessly promiscuous. There ensued a lifelong folie à deux in which Auden played the role of perfect wife to Kallman's philandering husband. The situation made Auden feel both absurd and virtuous. In short, he was Baba the Turk.

BABA was Auden's addition to Hogarth's story, and she has been a source of misunderstanding from the start. According to Robert Craft, Stravinsky's longtime amanuensis, Stravinsky's lawyer advised him to drop the entire project because Baba was a “sexual hoax.” Yet homosexual composers didn't

seem to appreciate the hoax any more than ostensibly straight critics did. Virgil Thomson praised the opera but predicted—correctly, as it turned out—that Baba, “a character drawn from female impersonation,” would not be easy to make convincing. Benjamin Britten, whose works are full of homosexual allusions, reportedly termed the opera “perverse.” Today, after a decade or more of “gender studies” and androgynous rock stars, one might assume that a bearded lady would no longer kill a show, but perhaps wrongly. As Thomson's remark indicates, there has always been confusion about whether Baba is supposed to be a woman or a man. Last year the Public Broadcasting System showed a Swedish movie of *The Rake's Progress* in which Baba was clearly a man, sung by a male alto with a short goatee. Instead of solving the problem, the TV movie just showed that in our enlightened age a drag queen is less threatening than a woman with a beard—and proved that Baba makes no sense at all as a cross-dressed man.

Whatever the personal sources of the character may have been, I think that Baba was Auden's way of embodying his love for the genre of opera in all its glorious absurdity. Baba breathes the spirit of opera itself—for she is nothing less—into the dead bones of *The Rake*. She throws the whole tidy moral universe of *The Rake* into confusion by showing us how dull it has grown. Morality is fine, she seems to say, but could we have some entertainment, please? And not a moment too soon. She seizes the stage in an ascending series of coups: a grand entrance, a funny patter song, and, before her grand exit, a breathtaking moment of compassion and renunciation that would have made Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who could well have been Auden's model as a librettist, weep with pleasure.

Baba was Auden's joker in the pack, his way of trumping his own moral pessimism by asserting the power of art over nature. Natural order is a recurring theme of *The Rake's Progress*. The action begins and ends in the spring; Anne's redemptive visit to Bedlam is like Persephone's journey to the underworld, necessary for a renewal of the natural. But at the same time, Tom's fall from grace comes from his pursuit of nature—not idyllic or mythological nature but the

modern understanding of instinctual violence, familiar to readers of Darwin and Freud and viewers of the Nature Channel. The unnatural Baba is the only character in the opera who transcends her moral (and physical) limitations. She graciously renounces any claims to Tom, and thereby makes possible Anne's act of forgiveness. Of course, Baba's grand act of sympathy is just one of her stage turns—and that is the point. She's the stage mother of us all. With her character Auden—not so awed by Stravinsky as he claimed—upstages the rites of spring by showing that although nature goes on from season to season, an opera can change the way we think and feel.

My own fondness for Baba perhaps shows that I remain an armchair opera lover. In the theater Baba remains one of the many enigmatic features of *The Rake's Progress* that make it seem more like a perverse waxworks opera than like the real thing. I can describe Baba as the spirit of opera, but few directors can sell Baba to the audience, as they can easily sell the character of Zerbinetta, in Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, who serves a similar symbolic purpose. There is no getting around the fact that the opera springs from Stravinsky's love-hate relationship with the operatic tradition. His ambivalence about the form separates his three mature operas (*Mavra*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *The Rake*) from those of born theater composers such as Puccini and Strauss, and Berg and Britten as well.

But if I remain hopeful that *The Rake's Progress* will take its place in the operatic repertory, it is less from studying the score at home than because of my first experience of the opera in the theater, thirty years ago. The Hamburg State Opera presented a revelatory series of modern works, including Berg's *Lulu* and Gunther Schuller's *Visitation*, at the Metropolitan Opera, in New York, in the summer of 1967. *The Rake's Progress* was directed by Gian Carlo Menotti, a composer whose conservative view of operatic tradition could not have been further from Stravinsky's. Menotti staged the piece straightforwardly and naturalistically, ignoring the heavy burden of allusion and cleverness. A simple country boy got chewed up by the temptations of the big city. His girlfriend remained faithful to the end. It was pure opera—and it broke my heart. ☹



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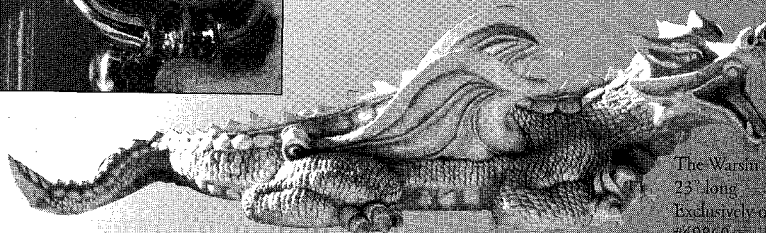
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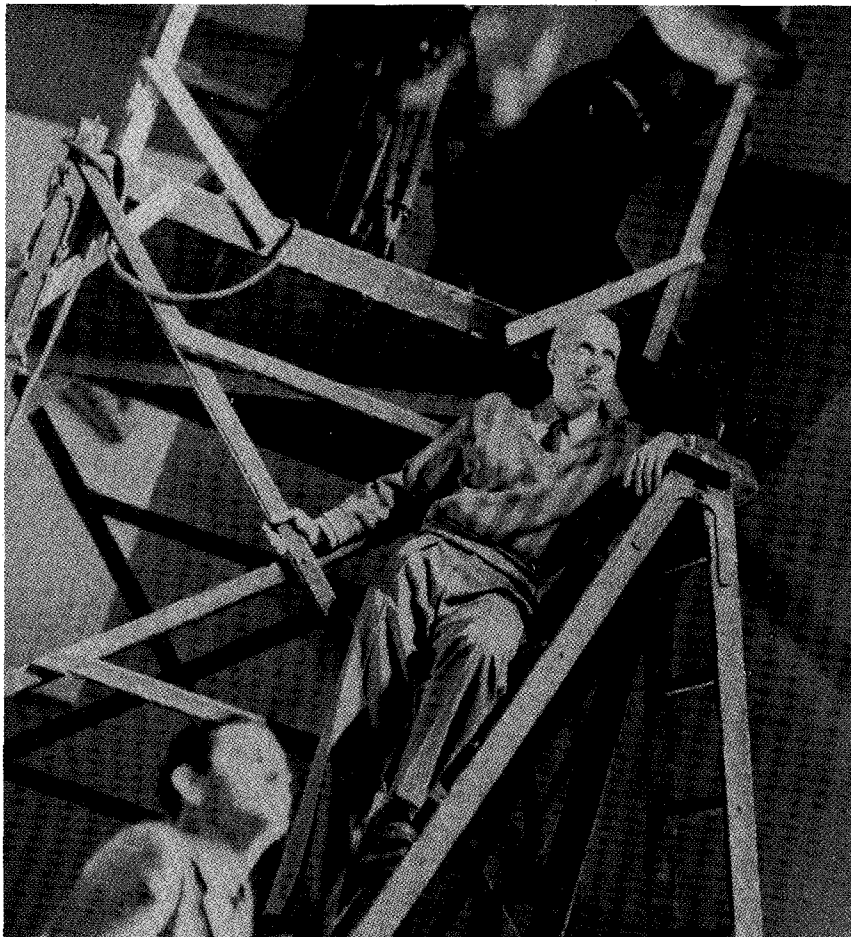
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PHOTOEST

The Poses of Howard Hawks

*A new biography depicts the
director of Red River and
other classics as a character out of
F. Scott Fitzgerald*

WHEN the French "rediscovered" American genre films in the 1950s, they understandably became enthusiastic about Howard Hawks. He had, after all, created masterpieces in a dizzying number of genres: the gangster film (*Scarface*, 1932), the screwball comedy (*Twentieth Century*, 1934; *Bringing Up Baby*, 1938; *Ball of Fire*, 1942), the aviation film (*Only An-*

gels Have Wings, 1939), the espionage tale (*To Have and Have Not*, 1944), the detective story (*The Big Sleep*, 1946), and the western (*Red River*, 1948).

Some would even add the war film (*Sergeant York*, 1941) and the musical (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, 1953).

It is customary to say that Hawks was an underappreciated artist until the French began to genuflect. But there had

always been a mystique around Hawks the man. In a film world where many had clawed their way up from grubby beginnings, he seemed to have dropped in from some airier and easier place. He financed pictures before he directed them, and radiated contempt for other producers. Cool, patrician, slim, impeccably dressed, he had an Ivy League education, a taste for expensive cars and horses and women, an itch for adventure and personal danger. In the 1940s he was married to one of the world's most beautiful women and living in what seemed to be Hollywood's most tasteful mansion. He was vaguely considered an intellectual, because he drank and hunted with Hemingway and Faulkner, yet he also knew things about the underworld through his gambling contacts and his friendship with the Chicago journalist Ben Hecht. He had been an important counselor to everyone with any power in Hollywood (he managed to inform people), and their projects had foundered or flourished to the degree that they had accepted his judgment. John Ford enviously called him "the grey fox." He was a WASP Monroe Stahr, Fitzgerald's Last Tycoon.

Todd McCarthy, in his new biography *Howard Hawks*, quietly dismantles much of this picture. There was far less to Hawks's Ivy League education than people thought. He had less than a year at Phillips Exeter, where he could not keep his grades high enough to return, though he had dropped back two years to be competitive. Though he was an indifferent student of engineering at Cornell, most members of its class of 1918, Hawks among them, were awarded degrees after three years on the grounds that they were going into the military. (Hawks became an Army flying instructor.)

In area after area Hawks, skilled at inflating his achievements, made himself his most carefully constructed artifact. He regularly ran down the contributions made by anyone else, even long-standing friends. As Lauren Bacall said of Hawks's stories, "He came out on top, he always won." Her husband first made Bacall realize this: "Bogie never believed any of the stories Howard told."

On the set of Bringing Up Baby

Bacall's reaction to Hawks was not unlike that of many women in his life, whom he won easily and lost rapidly. He wanted to *own* Bacall. When she made it clear that she was not sexually available, he sent his writer Jules Furthman to act as an intermediary—to be, as McCarthy puts it, “a pimp for his boss.” Hawks would not risk personal rejection if it could be avoided.

Bacall also resented Hawks's anti-Semitism, which made her hide her own background. When Hawks took her to lunch, he observed, at one point, “Do you notice how noisy it is in here suddenly? That's because Leo Forbstein just walked in—Jews always make more noise.” Though Hawks had Jewish friends, writers of talent like Ben Hecht, Bacall noticed that at the first big Hawks party she attended, the kind where everyone was there, she could find, as McCarthy says, “virtually no Jews, an almost impossible anomaly in Hollywood.” Hawks's wife at the time, later famous as Slim Keith (and Bacall's longtime friend), “told me,” Bacall says, “that her husband didn't want any Jews in his house—the only Jew he let in was [his agent Charles] Feldman.”

Bacall's comments have a wrenching force, because she was the dream of Hawks's life—or at least the dream at one remove. The original was his wife Slim (born Nancy Gross), a fashion plate who found “Betty Bacal” (one *l* then) for her husband—a model glimpsed in a fashion magazine. Hawks taught the image to talk huskily like the original, gave her the name Slim in the script for *To Have and Have Not*, and gave Bogart his wife's nickname for himself (Steve). He created the simulacrum as obsessively as Jimmy Stewart creates a second Kim Novak in *Vertigo*. But just as the shadowy “Slim” of the movie was rejecting him, the real Slim was slipping away. She would later call her former husband “a big tower of nothing.”

THOUGH he had a parade of inevidently beautiful women on his arm, Hawks was often described by these women as cold. Jean Harlow and Slim gave him low marks as a lover. McCarthy hints that he may have had a weak libidinal drive, which perhaps turned to impotence in later years (while the girls on his arm just got younger and prettier). He seemed to choose his women as he

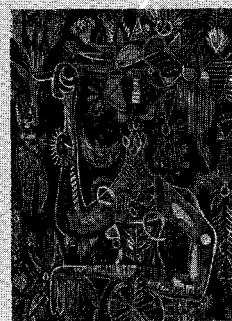
did his clothes, to set off his own pose. They were more for display than for use. They became part of his fascination with himself. (Joel McCrea, after working for him, said, “Hawks didn't care about anybody but himself.”)

Despite this callousness, there was something idealistic about the way Hawks pursued the Slim image for the rest of his life. McCarthy, perhaps searching for sympathetic aspects to the figure whose lies he has reluctantly uncovered, believes that Slim humanized his life and art, improving the latter if not the former—a highly challengeable proposition. Before Slim brought Bacall to him, despite his politically incorrect attitude toward real women, Hawks had created the rightly admired “Hawks woman”—quick in retort, self-assertive, taking control: Ann Dvorak in *Scarface*, Carole Lombard in *Twentieth Century*, Katharine Hepburn in *Bringing Up Baby*, Rosalind Russell in *His Girl Friday* (1940), Barbara Stanwyck in *Ball of Fire*.

Beginning with Bacall, in *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep*, Hawks's ideal of femininity changed. The women became slower, slinkier, still wily but not confrontational. Hawks spent the rest of his life trying to replicate Slim's discovery of Betty. He looked at fashion magazines and called up young models out of the blue—one was found in her freshman dorm at college, another was an eighteen-year-old model new on the Twentieth Century-Fox set. He had each of these ingenues shout herself hoarse to get a Slim-Betty huskiness into her voice. The result was a series of pretty nothings assembled for later Hawks films: Elsa Martinelli and Michele Girardon for *Hatari!* (1962); Charlene Holt (spotted in a Revlon commercial), Gail Hire (found on a billboard), and Laura Devon for *Red Line 7000* (1965); Michele Carey for *El Dorado* (1967); Jennifer O'Neill (who had graced fashion-magazine covers) and Sherry Lansing (in her pre-executive days) for *Rio Lobo* (1970). Some would make an exception to this list of disasters with Angie Dickinson in *Rio Bravo* (1959), though her gaga attitude toward “John T.” (John Wayne) is one of the sappier deviations from the earlier line of rapid-fire “Hawks women.” Dickinson's blatant attempt at Bacallism is unintentionally comic.

When Hawks tried to go back to the

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more bracing women of his pre-Slim days, he failed. Ann Sheridan's manic laughing grates against Cary Grant's exquisitely poised performance in *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949), proving that either Hawks or (more likely) Sheridan was incapable of Katharine Hepburn's insouciance or Rosalind Russell's irony in tilting against Grant. Yet Paula Prentiss in *Man's Favorite Sport?* (1964) made even Ann Sheridan look subtle.

As early as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) Hawks confessed that the brassy sexuality of Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell did not appeal to him: "I never thought of either of them as having any sex." His taste now ran to needy adolescent beginners.

A critic and Hawks celebrant, Leland Poague, calls the production numbers in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* typically Hawksian in the way they "escape social obligation." But McCarthy shows that Hawks deserves none of the credit for the production numbers (which take up 40 percent of the film). Another director was brought in to handle them—the choreographer Jack Cole, who was assisted by his longtime associate Gwen Verdon in the lengthy rehearsals that Monroe and Russell had to undergo to fake their dance steps. Russell says, "Howard Hawks had nothing to do with the musical numbers. He was not even there." Cole directed the camera setups in consultation with the director of photography (Russell's chosen man, Harry Wild) and the editor (Hugh Fowler).

McCarthy is very good on such details of the filming. He shows what was distinctive in Hawks's method, and, unlike some of the director's acolytes, he does not deny that Hawks went into a decline in his later career. Most long-lived directors, from D. W. Griffith on, have suffered such a falling off. It is hard to remain fresh and creative while controlling all the clashing elements that go into making major films.

As McCarthy breaks through Hawks's protective shell of misrepresentations, this golden figure takes on a poignant quality—all that effort to be

what he was not. There is even pathos in the desire of many around him (but not those closest to him) to preserve the magic illusion. Hawks comes to seem less like Monroe Stahr than Jay Gatsby, the glamorous figure with a hollowness inside. Despite others' treatment of Hawks as an intellectual, McCarthy notes that he "read little but mystery novels"—and we are reminded that the handsomely bound volumes in Gatsby's

library had their pages uncut. Even Hawks's need to parade beauties before his friends brings Gatsby to mind: "It excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy—it increased her value in his eyes. He felt their presence

all about the house, pervading the air with the shades and echoes of still vibrant emotions." Hawks's compulsive gambling, the constant remaking of his past, the desperate quest for new props (exotic cars, younger women), reveal urgent needs under the pose of ease and superiority. Hawks's rise had a touch of the bogus, like Gatsby's. McCarthy goes so far as to say that he "essentially bought, socialized, and married his way up the career ladder."

McCarthy's immersion in Hawks's biography makes him, understandably, favor films that are revealing of the man. He thinks, therefore, that *To Have and Have Not* is the quintessential and best Hawks film. Despite its blatant imitation of Bogart's preceding hit, *Casablanca*, the film is devoted to Hawks's self-image. The problem with that, as McCarthy says, is that the self-image came from a "sophisticated teenage-boy mentality," from "adolescent notions of stoicism" embarrassingly revealed in an unfilmed Hawks script for a buddy film with traits McCarthy describes as "infantile, racist, and politically naive."

Hawks's self-indulgence can be seen in a favorite device used to show off his wounded but stoic masculinity. With dreary frequency an impressed but rebuffed heroine says something like "She must have been some woman." The hero asks who. "The one who hurt you so." We get that dialogue, or a variant of it, in *Only Angels Have Wings*, *To Have and*

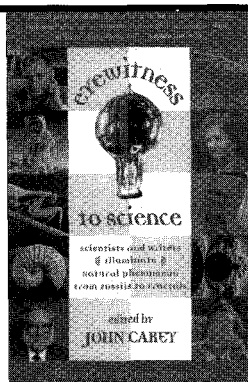


Bogart, Bacall, and Hawks

Have Not, Red River, Rio Bravo, and Hatari! It catches the sentimental and self-pitying aspect of the director's Gatsby pose. This explains why so many Hawks critics become Nick Carraways, yearning toward their hero's yearning. Though McCarthy avoids the worst excesses of this Carrawayism, his interest in the Hawks pose makes him seriously underrate the greatest Hawks films. He likes the Hawks way of improvising—which often meant repeating stock effects—and does not appreciate how much Hawks benefited from the disciplinary force of other talents. The lax self-indulgence of his later movies stands in contrast to the brilliant things Hawks could do when he was given a well-made play to work with (*Twentieth Century*) or an economical story like Billy Wilder's for *Ball of Fire* (with Wilder's script). When Hawks worked with Faulkner, the tales rambled self-indulgently as the two men played to their images of each other.

The comic films of the thirties and early forties gave Hawks a detachment from the hero. This kept him from turning (say) Cary Grant's Walter Burns into a daydream version of himself. Similarly, Hawks was almost clinical in his approach to the Paul Muni character in *Scarface*. Hawks got John Barrymore's best performance in the sound era by playing on the actor's idiosyncrasies, not on his own. He became as hard toward Wayne as he had been toward Muni when he drove that unbreakable figure to a breakup in *Red River*—a far cry from Hawks's complicity in Wayne's stock swaggering in the last westerns they made together. Hawks could see the absurdity as well as the attractiveness of Grant in *Bringing Up Baby* and *His Girl Friday*—and the same thing applies to his use of Gary Cooper in *Ball of Fire*. By no accident, these earlier films are the ones with the strongest and most independent women, who are not forced to collapse into the arms of a Hawks simulacrum, like the later ingenues in whom Hawks as Gatsby was seeking his impossible Daisy.

Hawks the artist should be disengaged from Hawks the solipsistic object of his own life's posturings. If Todd McCarthy has not entirely done that, he has gone further than anyone else in sorting out the truths and lies of the life, the skills and the insight and the self-deceptions of the work. ☞



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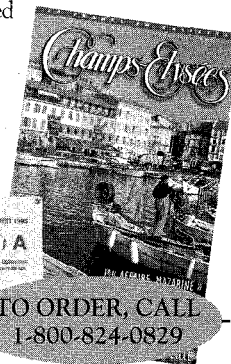
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The Conservative Line on Race

In a book uniting social science with ideological argument, the authors contend that African-Americans should rejoice in the progress they have made since the 1960s, stop playing "the race card," and renounce the other articles of racial liberalism

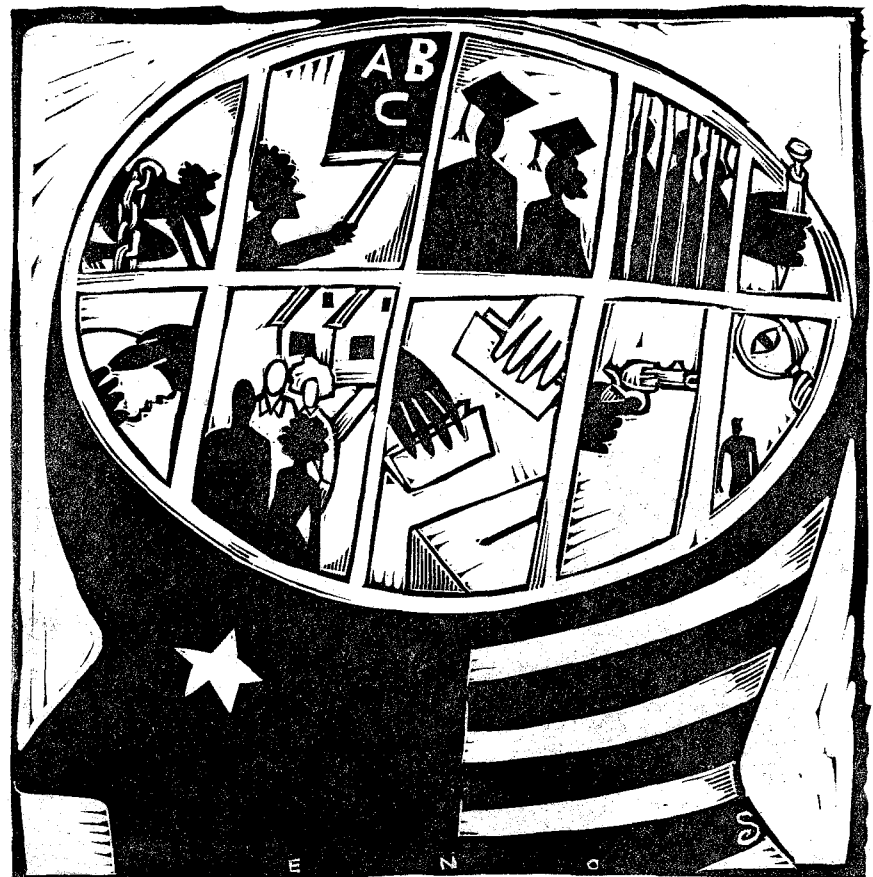
by Glenn C. Loury

AMERICA IN BLACK AND WHITE: One Nation, Indivisible

by Stephan Thernstrom and
Abigail Thernstrom.
Simon and Schuster, 704 pages,
\$32.50.

THAT the United States of America, "a new nation, conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," began as a slave society is a profound historical irony. The "original sin" of slavery has left an indelible imprint on our nation's soul. Hundreds of thousands were slaughtered in a tragic, calamitous civil war—the price this new democracy had to pay to rid itself of that most undemocratic institution. But, of course, the end of slavery did not usher in an era of democratic equality for blacks. Another century was to pass before a national commitment to pursue that goal could be achieved. Meaningful civic inclusion even now eludes many of our fellow citizens who are recognizably of African descent. What does that say about the character of our civic culture as we move into a new century? For its proper telling this peculiarly American story in black and white requires an appreciation of irony, and a sense of the tragic.

White attitudes toward blacks today are not what they were at the end of slavery, or in the 1930s. Nor is black marginalization nearly as severe. Segregation is dead, and the open violence once used to enforce it has for all practical purposes



been eradicated. We have made great progress, but we have a long way to go, and we are in deep disagreement about how further to proceed. The problem we have solved is the one Gunnar Myrdal described in his classic 1944 treatise, *An American Dilemma*. There he contrasted America's lofty political ideals with the seemingly permanent second-class status of Negroes. This framing of the problem shaped the conscience of a generation of American intellectuals and activists com-

ing to maturity in the years 1945–1960. Myrdal urged whites to choose the nobility of their ideals over the comfort of long-standing social arrangements. In due course they did, and that was a great achievement.

Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom belong to that postwar generation of racial progressives who believed in Myrdal's vision and struggled to see it realized. Like a great many others of similar bent, they retained an abiding interest in the

subject, but they grew ever more estranged from what the “progressive” position on racial issues came to represent.

Stephan Thernstrom is the Winthrop Professor of History at Harvard University, and a pioneer in the field of quantitative social history. He earned his reputation a quarter century ago with the publication of *The Other Bostonians*, a now-classic study of Boston’s immigrant working class. Abigail Thernstrom, his wife, is a political scientist, best known for her 1987 book, *Whose Votes Count?* That prizewinning work offered a powerful and, for many people, compelling critique of federal voting-rights law as it evolved over the two decades following the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

For the past seven years this superbly qualified team has labored to produce a comprehensive assessment of changes in American race relations in the half century since the appearance of Myrdal’s epic. *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* is the result. It is a large, ambitious book that combines historical narrative and data-driven policy analysis with trenchant social criticism. The three-part text treats the history of blacks from Reconstruction through the 1960s; economic, political, and social progress for blacks over the past thirty years; and recent race-oriented public policies affecting education, voting, employment, and government contracting. The final two chapters survey the current racial climate and envision how American race relations might develop in the future.

America in Black and White is an important, learned, and searching statement on our age-old social dilemma. It unapologetically celebrates the racial reforms realized by the institutions of American democracy over the past two generations, using a before-and-after narrative to highlight how rapid and extensive the change has been. The authors’ argument, buttressed by some 2,000 footnotes, rests on an impressive review of the scholarly literature in history, law, and the social sciences. Even so, the well-crafted prose conveys mastery of the subject without lapsing into jargon. Indeed, the book often moves smoothly between commentary on current affairs and scholarly exegesis. Such accessibility is a virtue, of course, but given the au-

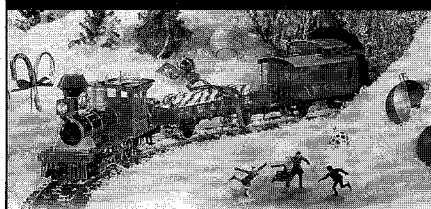
thors’ evident objectives it is also a necessity. For, more than a survey of social trends or a critical assessment of public policy, *America in Black and White* is a passionately rendered manifesto preaching what can fairly be called a conservative line on the race issue.

This is no sin. Nor can it come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the authors’ opinion journalism over the past decade. Still, *America in Black and White* is, and seems very much intended to be, a combative book. Reading it, one cannot escape the impression that the enemy is being engaged. Although conceived long before President Bill Clinton initiated his national dialogue on racial issues, the book’s publication at this moment offers, in effect, an opening salvo from the right in that proposed debate.

The enemy on whom the Thernstroms have fixed their sights is the latter-day public philosophy of racial liberalism—what the economist Thomas Sowell once called “the civil-rights vision.” This is the notion that ongoing white racism is the main barrier to black progress, and that some kind of affirmative action is the appropriate remedy. Another crucial feature of the civil-rights vision as depicted here is that it fosters undue race consciousness by sustaining a sense of grievance among blacks of all classes—encouraging them to “play the race card.” Following the political scientist Donald Horowitz, the authors pithily refer to this belief in the enduring power of race as “the figment of the pigment.”

The 1968 report of the Kerner Commission, written in the aftermath of the great urban riots, was an early statement of this brand of racial liberalism. The social critic Andrew Hacker’s book *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*, which was a best seller in the wake of the Los Angeles riot of 1992, represents a more recent example of similar thinking. The Thernstroms’ subtitle, “One Nation, Indivisible,” reads like a defiant rejection of Hacker, whose arguments, indeed, are not as weighty as theirs. And the authors take pains to argue (persuasively) that the Kerner Commission’s gloomy forecast of racial apartheid, however plausible at the time, has been nullified by subsequent developments. These turn out to be soft targets. Nevertheless, a great many adher-

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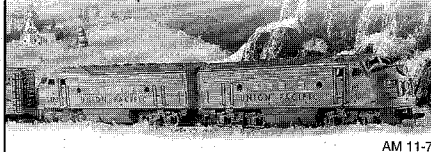
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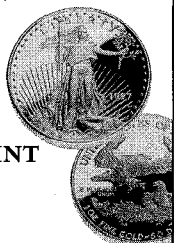
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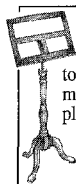


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ents of the civil-rights vision remain at large among us, and the authors seem determined to ferret them out and to prove them wrong.

THE civil-rights movement as a force capable of shaping the moral and political sensibilities of the American public on questions of race was all but finished a quarter century ago. True, few who noticed were brave enough to say so at that time, but gaping holes in the intellectual positions of racial liberals have been evident, and widely discussed, for more than a decade now. It has been about twenty years since William Julius Wilson's seminal *The Declining Significance of Race* and James Q. Wilson's incomparable *Thinking About Crime*. Sowell's *Ethnic America* appeared in 1981, Charles Murray's *Losing Ground* in 1984, Shelby Steele's *The Content of Our Character* in 1990. The reality of demographic transformation—the growing importance of Asian and Hispanic ethnics in the country's political culture—has marginalized black liberals in city after city. The prisons are stuffed to overflowing with, for the most part, young black men, and nobody is talking about letting them loose. The federal welfare entitlement, on which a third of black children depended for their subsistence, was terminated in the last session of Congress. Busing is dead as social policy, and affirmative action is tottering.

Who doubts today that blacks have made stunning economic and social progress, relative to their condition before the Second World War? Who denies that crime, drugs, poor school performance, and family instability are major barriers to upward mobility in the black lower classes? Who cannot see that racial preferences, minority-business set-asides, race-norming of employment tests, and the like are on the way out? Racial liberals, that's who; and they muster voting majorities in only a very few places. The rest of us, including a great many Democrats, now take these positions for granted, by and large. So there is a sense in which the Thernstroms are flogging a dead horse, though, admittedly, there was more life in the horse when they started this project.

Which is certainly not to say that there is nothing new in the voluminous, carefully presented evidence they have

amassed. Part One of this book is an often lyrically written and subtly argued historical narrative recounting, respectfully but not uncritically, the tribulations and triumphs of American blacks from Emancipation through the 1960s. Woven through the chapters in Part Two is a wealth of evidence, unlike any I have seen elsewhere, on the progressive liberalization of racial attitudes among whites over the past half century. There is also an exhaustive and valuable exploration of changes in urban residential segregation over the past thirty years, which breaks new ground. And scattered throughout the text and notes are fresh interpretations and close readings of recent social trends (in black college attendance and concerning the racial gap in academic achievement, for example), which specialists will find provocative.

But a "black hat-white hat" approach to intellectual combat is also evident in this book. A great deal of effort is expended detailing how assorted usual suspects—the American Civil Liberties Union, academic racial liberals, the National Education Association, black civil-rights activists, *The New York Times* editorial page, the loony Afrocentric left—have with their good intentions only made things worse, or with their bad intentions threatened the integrity of our democracy. An oft-repeated theme in the presentation of data is that black failure, not white racism, is the real issue. A frequent assertion, as an article of faith, is that if the government would just get out of the business of classifying citizens on the basis of race, blacks would focus less on their racial identity, and socio-political conflicts across racial lines would probably be much less severe.

Although there is some plausibility, some truth, in these positions, they do not encompass the whole truth about our racial drama. Reading through these more than 500 pages, one hungers for some allusion to the ironic, the paradoxical, and especially the tragic elements in America's enduring dilemma. Yet the authors seem bent on refuting their opponents from the past decade's culture wars—so much so that they often fail to display the subtlety of thought and the generosity of spirit of which they are no doubt capable, and on which an appreciation of irony and tragedy depends.

THERE are, of course, some real enemies with responsibilities in real institutions, whose heads are filled with wrong ideas, and whose hands touch the lives of millions. Their erroneous beliefs richly deserve refutation. Moreover, it is true that some among the power elite—in the federal courts, the national press, the universities, and the Democratic Party—continue to credit a simpleminded version of the civil-rights vision as described above. They, too, warrant criticism. But the larger truth is that a populist backlash against black claims was already evident in the 1970s. And an intellectual backlash running through the 1980s has now gathered such force that black welfare mothers, juvenile felons, and poorly performing students have increasingly few people in academic and policy circles who are concerned with promoting their well-being.

America in Black and White relies on the creative survey work of the political scientist Paul Sniderman, of Stanford University, and his colleagues to argue that this defection of the white majority from racially liberal policy positions does not constitute evidence of defection from a normative commitment to the ideal of racial equality of opportunity. This is relevant if the question is “Are whites really as big a bunch of racists as the liberals say?” But it is much less relevant when the question becomes, as it should, “What, then, must we do with and for the one third or so of black America that seems to be permanently alienated from the structures of opportunity in this society?” It may be true, as the Thernstroms imply, that if blacks were more like Asians, we would have less of a problem. But how is such a counterfactual observation supposed to help?

Being right about liberals’ having been wrong is an accomplishment, to be sure, but it is no longer good enough. Many among the black intellectual and political elites are confused, angry, and scared. They lash out unreasonably, they play the race card with abandon, and they long for the moral simplicity of an earlier time. This may be deplorable, but under the circumstances it is understandable. Harder to understand is why so many serious students of the race problem in this country are content to start and end their discussion with a demonstration of the fact that racial liberals are

confused, angry, and scared. Fixation on this point distorts one’s ethical and scientific judgment. It is bad for the soul. It is a sin—one that is committed over and over again in this book. As a result, despite the many fine qualities the authors bring to the execution of their task, they have in my view failed to produce a work worthy of Myrdal’s mantle, to guide our public discourse on racial matters into the twenty-first century.

AMERICA in *Black and White* projects a view of the woeful American calamity now playing itself out in the black underclass which can be paraphrased, I think not unfairly, as follows: If many blacks languish, that is their own fault, raising no policy-relevant issue of racial unfairness. Work is available in the inner cities; immigrants can find it, why not blacks? If blacks would marry, if they would cut out their disruptive behavior inside school buildings, if they would just stop their lawbreaking, their prospects would brighten. If whites appear not to want to live near blacks, well, who can blame them? Certainly not a black middle class that has no interest in seeing its property values fall either, making all the fuss about a “black community” dubious indeed. If blacks could only let go of their racial fixations, abandon the “figment of the pigment,” and take the risks of failure associated with unaided competition in American society, America’s long struggle with the demon of race might finally come to an end.

Although I do not agree with this view, I am not without sympathy for it. But I believe it is too narrow, too inflexible, and too ideological a way of thinking ever to produce genuine wisdom about our racial dilemma. This difference of opinion is, in the end, a matter of taste, or judgment; it does not rest on scientific evidence. But one’s outlook can powerfully influence which evidence one chooses to examine and how one looks at it. There are times when I believe that the Thernstroms’ outlook distorts their analysis. Thus it may be useful to review critically some of the ways in which the authors use their data to bolster their broader, thematic argument. Necessarily, I can touch on only a few of the many topics taken up in *America in Black and White*. I hope not to distort the book’s intended argument in so doing.

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In their chapter on poverty the authors describe the relationship between “black crime” (a “loaded phrase,” they say, but one that is “hard to avoid”) and black poverty as follows: Racial liberals think poverty causes crime. It is more probable that the opposite is true—that “the appallingly high level of black crime” causes poverty, because it discourages business activity in black communities and leads employers to treat black males with suspicion, thereby increasing black unemployment. So liberals, who need to believe a simple morality tale about the causes of crime because they find the self-destructive reality of “black crime” too painful to face, get the story exactly backwards.

Now, the claim that poverty causes crime is questionable. But the speculation offered in this book that crime is an important cause of poverty among blacks is empirically weak, and what is more, the authors’ argument for it is logically inconsistent. They (rightly, in my view) dispute the “spatial mismatch” theory (that black unemployment is due to jobs’ moving from city to suburbs) but then, literally on the next page, assert that by driving business from the inner cities, “black crime” contributes to black unemployment. These claims cannot both be true. Moreover, their hypothesis has been directly investigated, and rejected, in a recent econometric study by the economist Steven Rivkin. Using the High School and Beyond Longitudinal Survey to investigate whether, if the test scores and family backgrounds of a sample of young adults in the 1980s are controlled for, the crime level in a person’s community affected his or her chances of being unemployed, the study concluded, “There is little or no evidence . . . that community crime . . . rates affected the probability of employment for Blacks.” In the end the Thernstroms’ account of black joblessness as being largely determined by crime rates (and low test scores) strikes this reader as rhetorically effective but intellectually unpersuasive.

In the same chapter the authors cite studies finding that children living in single-parent homes are more likely to fail in school or end up with juvenile criminal records. Most social scientists are rightly skeptical of such findings when the studies in question do not con-

trol for family income. It may be the absence of money, not of a father, that causes the bad outcome for the child. But the Thernstroms say it “makes no sense” to control for income, because the connections between single parenthood and poverty are so strong that holding income constant is “artificial.” Why do they say this when there are enough poor families with two parents, and enough nonpoor families with one, that controlling for income is a routine, sensible statistical practice? The findings they cite actually survive such controls. But their argumentative tone persists.

It is possible that a careful study would show that college athletes perform as well in the classroom as non-athletes if you control for the number of hours a week they devote to studying. But if most of them don’t study nearly as much as other students, their GPA controlled for hours of study is not of great interest. What matters is how well they perform. Likewise, median income in 1995 was only \$15,004 for female-headed black families, little more than a third of what it was in black married-couple families. This is not a fact that should be obscured by controlling for other related factors.

This seems wrongheaded; nobody is trying to “obscure” anything. Surely it does matter whether it is primarily less studying, rather than some intrinsic aspect of athletic participation, that depresses a football player’s grades. If it is, the problem can be solved by mandating an increase in his study time; if it is not, the only solution is for him to stop playing ball. Similarly, it would be worth knowing whether a shortage of funds available to single mothers in and of itself leads to poor outcomes for their children. If it does, then more money for those mothers, with or without husbands, would help those kids.

I mean to do more here than quibble about methodology. The Thernstroms’ fixation on refuting liberals can lead them astray on important matters of policy as well. Consider the discussion in the chapter on crime of the impact that a national war on drugs has had on black imprisonment. The number of black males in this country’s prisons and jails has more than tripled since 1980. Many observers (including this one) are con-

vinced that the anti-drug effort had only a minor impact on the price and availability of cocaine but has been of major importance in increasing black incarceration. The authors deny this. Although they “offer no brief for or against” the drug policy, they nevertheless claim that

critics who depict the War on Drugs as an unmitigated disaster for young blacks typically exaggerate its impact on black incarceration rates. As Table 2 demonstrated, African Americans are a bit *less* likely to be arrested for drug offenses than they are for most other crimes.

In fact Table 2 shows no such thing. It provides the per capita arrest rates of blacks *relative* to the population as a whole for various offenses, allowing one to see, for example, that in 1995 a randomly chosen black person was 2.9 times as likely to be arrested for a drug offense and 4.3 times as likely to be arrested for murder as a randomly chosen person from the general population. But this does not mean that in *absolute* terms fewer blacks were arrested for drug offenses than for murder. Indeed, just the opposite was true. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 1993 only three percent of people newly admitted to state prisons had been sentenced for murder, but nearly 30 percent had been sentenced for drug offenses. What the authors assert about the relative significance of drug arrests is simply wrong.

Moreover, the direct evidence is overwhelming that the war on drugs, which intensified in the late 1980s, played a major role in the sharp rise in black incarceration that occurred during the same period. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that from 1985 to 1990 the number of people in state prison whose most serious offense was drug-related (more relevant than arrest figures) skyrocketed from 38,900 to 148,600. And the number of black male adults held in prisons or jails rose from 309,800 to 508,800 over the same period. Furthermore, more than two thirds of people committed to state prisons in 1992 for drug offenses were black. If this same proportion held during the late 1980s, then the growth of drug imprisonment accounted for more than a third of the increase in black incarceration from 1985 to 1990, making it in all likelihood the single most important factor. We can,

it would seem, safely dismiss the Thernstroms' dismissal of the "critics."

In their chapter on residential segregation, citing the sociologist David Armor, the authors dispute the relevance of a number of careful empirical studies of housing discrimination that used "testers"—black couples and white couples who visited real-estate agents to test whether they received equal treatment. Such studies on the whole find evidence for a nontrivial degree of anti-black discrimination. The authors hold that these findings overstate the true extent of housing discrimination as experienced by blacks, because the testers distribute themselves randomly across the housing market, whereas black home buyers tend to seek housing only in certain geographic areas. Their conclusion, despite the testers' findings, is that housing discrimination is not an important factor in accounting for residential segregation.

There appears to be an obvious conceptual flaw in this argument. Since black home buyers choose where to seek housing in part according to the treatment they expect in different locales, their nonrandom spatial distribution is itself a reflection of the discriminatory practices that the randomly distributed testers have uncovered. For this reason the testers' findings of discrimination ought not to be minimized. To illustrate: Suppose a survey of supermarkets finds that blacks are overcharged for groceries at certain stores. Is it not likely that fewer black shoppers will visit those establishments? Who would then say that the finding of discrimination against black shoppers is of limited interest? Of course, our society has little at stake in where people shop; but segregated suburban residential patterns are, or should be, a much more serious matter.

The authors' review of trends in the academic achievement of black students serves well as a final example. This chapter is a microcosm of the many strengths and the great weaknesses of this book. It tells hard truths unsparingly, but it also dwells too long on yesterday's battles. It contains insights deserving a wide reading, along with unfounded speculations that, in my opinion, are best ignored. Its selection and presentation of evidence is at times searching and at other times tendentious and misleading.

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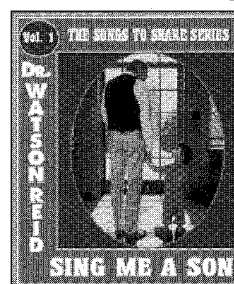
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follows: The racial performance gap, as measured by a national test of students' knowledge, is huge. This gap had been closing until the late 1980s; it has now begun to widen sharply. Among the chief reasons that black students do poorly relative to whites is that teachers and administrators do not challenge them to perform to the same standards as whites, perhaps out of fear that they are incapable of so performing. In addition, the desire to achieve racial diversity in the teaching force has resulted in affirmative-action hiring of underqualified black teachers ("Can they teach what they don't know?" the authors wonder), a trend abetted by powerful union opposition to teacher testing on the grounds that it adversely affects blacks. Possible reasons that in the 1980s the gap between black and white students' performance stopped shrinking and began growing include what the authors call "Afrocentric delusions," said to influence the curriculum offered black youngsters; a black youth culture in which the "price of popularity" for black students is "to embrace the values celebrated in rap music"; and a growing level of violence in the schools that black youngsters attend. There is "no great mystery about how to get better academic results," the Thernstroms conclude: emulate the Catholic schools, with their emphasis on safety, discipline, and a no-frills curriculum.

Here are some problems with this argument. The complaint about opposition to competency testing is correct in principle but of limited relevance to the problem at hand. Legal challenges to these tests have been roundly defeated. Teacher-competency testing is now widespread (in forty-three states as of last year), and it significantly limits the entry of blacks into teaching. Black pass rates are often under 50 percent, and according to results surveyed by Ronald Ferguson, of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, most of those who fail the exam on the first taking never become teachers. It is highly improbable that the intellectual inadequacies of black teachers can account for the academic performance of black students. After all, teacher testing swept the nation, keeping low-scoring blacks out of the profession, during the mid-to-late 1980s, just about when the racial achievement gap among students

began to widen. Moreover, black students are taught overwhelmingly by white teachers. Even in central cities, according to Linda Darling-Hammond, of Columbia University, three quarters of public school teachers are white.

Though this may not be the authors' intention, *America in Black and White* casts aspersions on the abilities of black teachers as a group that are unfounded. Consider its treatment of affirmative action in the teaching profession.

In the 1993–1994 academic year . . . 7.4 percent of the teachers in the nation's public schools were African American. . . . African Americans constituted 6.2 percent of those [ages forty to forty-four] with a bachelor's degree or more, so they were actually slightly overrepresented as classroom teachers. Moreover, they were more than a little overrepresented in the ranks of school principals. In 1993, 10.1 percent of all public school principals in the United States were African American, a figure one-third larger than the 7.4 percent share of teaching posts that they held. Since principals are drawn from the ranks of teachers, this substantial disparity suggests that school authorities in a great many American communities in recent years have given fairly strong preferences to black candidates seeking to pursue administrative careers. Black teachers and principals thus have an edge in the competition.

What is odd here is that should the numbers have shown a modest *underrepresentation* of blacks, the Thernstroms would surely have rejected an argument of this form in behalf of the claim that blacks were victims of discrimination. That discrimination cannot be proved on the basis of aggregate statistics is one of the first lessons of labor economics. The authors proceed to cite anecdotal evidence to the effect that black education professionals are highly sought after, but this, too, proves little. Indeed, evidence of any systematic bias in favor of blacks in the labor market is quite weak. Elsewhere in the book the authors indirectly endorse this point by citing economic studies that compare the earnings of blacks and whites. These studies have uniformly found that once test scores are controlled for, racial differences in the rewards of work are quite small but usually favor whites. The authors fail to note

that these studies provide evidence against the claim that because of affirmative action, blacks are widely favored in the labor market. I am not saying that no blacks benefit from preferential treatment. I am saying that scholars should be cautious about claiming that many blacks do, and modest in the extent to which they impute large-scale social developments to this particular cause.

So the numbers cited here do not demonstrate that "fairly strong preference" has been given to black teachers and administrators. It is entirely possible that a greater predilection for (or ability at!) administrative work among black teachers could account for their 2.7 percent "overrepresentation" in principals' jobs. Consider that the age distribution of black teachers is dramatically different from that of whites. According to the Patterson Research Institute of the United Negro College Fund, among female public school teachers in the 1993–1994 academic year blacks were only 4.4 percent of those under thirty, and fully 10.8 percent of those fifty or older. In fact, the growth of teacher-competency testing and the opening up of employment opportunities outside teaching have probably left blacks *underrepresented* in the ranks of new teachers. (The number of black women earning bachelors' degrees grew by more than half from 1977 to 1994.) Moreover, the strong possibility is that the absence in the past of alternative career paths for college-educated blacks has something to do with their prominence among more senior teachers and school administrators. Frankly, I believe that the authors are chasing an affirmative-action phantom here.

There are other problems. I carry no brief for Afrocentric education, particularly of the extreme variety cited in the book. But it is hard to believe that this fringe development among black educators could play anything other than a very minor role in explaining broad trends in black students' test scores. A large racial gap in academic performance is evident even among young children in the earliest years of school. Moreover, a recent scholarly investigation of this question by Larry Hedges and Amy Nowell, of the University of Chicago, concluded that the racial test-score gap among twelfth graders has narrowed over time, primarily because of changes

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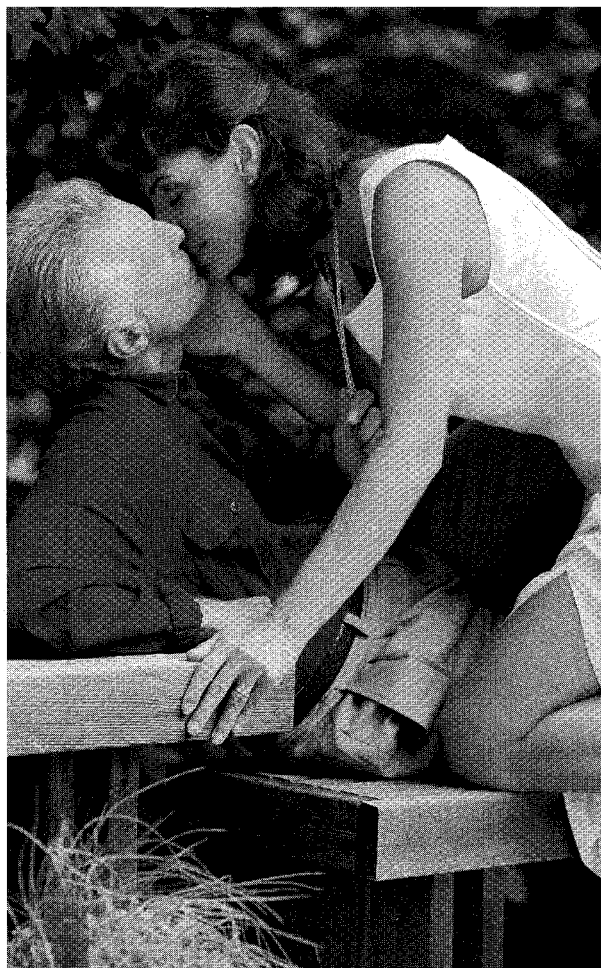
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in the socioeconomic status of black parents. Holding parental status constant, the gap has not changed much for a quarter century. This leaves little room for black “delusions” as a causal factor.

In *America in Black and White* the entire discussion of the relevance of racial identity for the teaching of black students reads more like a venting of spleen than a serious analysis. How many kids are actually taught by Afrocentrists? The authors have no idea. Does the trend in black test scores look any different in states that have high concentrations of black students in urban settings from the way it looks where the black population is smaller and more dispersed? They don't say. They just have a feeling that Afrocentrism must be damaging the education of black youngsters—and it may be. But in the context of a discussion of national trends the claim is a real stretch. In a resounding declaration against their Afrocentric enemies, the Thernstroms announce that “black children do not need therapeutic strategies” to boost their self-esteem. Perhaps. But how, one wonders, would they know?

THAT brings me to the issue of race consciousness. *America in Black and White* takes a very strong line in favor of what might be called “racelessness” for blacks (and whites). The authors castigate a black high school student for speaking of “my people” in reference to people of African descent. “His people” should be simply the American people, they suggest. Would that it were so. Public expressions of racial solidarity by blacks worry them. They call “racially divisive” a slogan one used to see on T-shirts—“It's a black thing, you wouldn't understand.” They go this far: The police in Boston, believing the story of one Charles Stuart, a white man who alleged that his wife had been killed by a black, laid down an invasive dragnet seeking the killer in a largely black community. Later it was learned that Stuart himself had slain his wife. The Thernstroms argue in this context that the credulity of the police was understandable, in part because rap-music lyrics declare all whites to be the enemy, and worthy objects of black violence.

The Thernstroms know that race relations are not at a happy juncture in America these days. They discuss the

O. J. Simpson trial, a source of much recent racial disharmony, at length. (All they can find to say about that enormous expression of race consciousness, the 1995 Million Man March, is that Minister Louis Farrakhan, who called the march, gave a bizarre speech.) Their diagnosis of the problem places great weight on a syllogism that may now be outmoded, proposed originally by Shelby Steele: Blacks and whites are supposedly locked into a relationship of mutual psychological dependence and reciprocal cognitive dissonance. Blacks fear they may be inferior. Whites fear they may be racist. Blacks want status achievement while avoiding true competition, which might reveal their inferiority. Whites want to avoid a confrontation with black claimants over the basis of black status, so as not to appear to be racist. Blacks convey approval to whites, certifying them as morally fit; and whites provide status to blacks, protecting them from the reality of their competitive inadequacies.

This purported symbiosis accounts for blacks' aggressive displays of their sense of grievance. Thus

The relentless pretense that almost all whites are an enemy, that white racism remains a constant, serves a purpose. It invites whites who are nervous about their racial rectitude to remain supplicants. The result is an unending game (black anger, white guilt) in which the white score is always zero, and the illusion of power is bestowed upon a group whose members seem to live in constant fear that their hard-earned status is not quite real—that they remain the “invisible” men and women they once so clearly were.

This was a new insight a decade ago. It has not worn well over time, however. Events like the publication of *The Bell Curve*, the 1994 elections, and the passage in California of Proposition 209 raise questions about the power of white guilt to drive political culture in this country. Is it not enough to cast an eye over the scene unfolding in inner-city America in order to grasp that blacks have real reasons to be angry, and that the white score in the game that counts is positive after all?

The authors of *America in Black and White* blame the existence of affirmative action—in college admissions, in the

drawing of voting districts, in employment—for an excess of race consciousness among blacks. This, they say, gives blacks an incentive to sustain their belief in “the figment of the pigment.” The authors consider recommending that official government bodies do away entirely with the use of racial categories in economic and social statistics, but ultimately reject the idea. They note that in 1993 a group of big-city mayors asked the U.S. Attorney General to cease collecting crime data by race, because this information was of no use to policy and fostered harmful stereotypes. These officials reasoned, not without some basis in experience, that if people are constantly told that most criminals are black, they may come to think that most blacks are criminal. The Thernstroms chide these mayors for inconsistency—the mayors want the bad racial news suppressed, but welcome the collection of employment or education data showing that blacks are underrepresented in some desirable pursuit.

The crime statistics had wonderfully concentrated the mayors’ minds. Momentarily, at least, they recalled what liberals had always believed until the late 1960s but had chosen to forget when they were converted to affirmative action: racial classifications perpetuate racism. The mayors did not object to racial body counts on principle, as liberals once had. They were simply troubled by the publication of statistics that made African Americans look bad.

There is a great deal wrong with this posture, more than I can detail here. The fundamental problem is the absence of a sense of tragic irony concerning the role that racial stigma plays in our society and culture. Perhaps I could put it this way: It’s not the *figment of the pigment* but the *enigma of the stigma* that underlies our drama in black and white. Why can’t the authors see the difference between the collection of data that may identify racial differences in opportunity and the collection of data that call greater public attention to “black pathology”? Is their “color-blind” principle so brittle that it cannot accommodate a concern about high black poverty rates while at the same time avoiding the racial stereotypes evoked by a phrase like “black crime”? That a successful middle-class black man

in this country cannot buy or sell a home, raise and educate his children, or pursue his life’s work without having constantly, and in innumerable ways, to deal with the stigma of race surely has something to do with the survival in that man’s mind of a fealty to “his people.” If you want him to abandon the figment of the pigment, why not lend a hand at dispelling the enigma of the stigma?

The case made in this book for racelessness is abstract, divorced from the texture of social life in this country, made mainly in the service of a color-blind policy argument, and, ironically, ahistorical. The authors like Colin Powell—and so do I. He is, for them, the black-who-doesn’t-harp-on-being-black presidential candidate, whose promising electoral prospects in 1995 showed that the country was ready to move beyond race. Yet if one reads Powell’s autobiography and his revealing interview in *The New Yorker*, or if one spends time talking to him, as I have done, one discovers that consciousness of race is at the very core of his being. He knows, and freely says, that but for being black he would never have risen to his position, and having so risen, would never have commanded the political interest that he did. That he is not a race-monger is to his credit, I believe. But his life story is no brief for racelessness—quite the contrary. Indeed, just about every effective strategy of which I am aware that is being carried out in poor black communities to combat the scourges of violence, low academic achievement, and family instability builds positively on the kind of ethnic consciousness that Powell’s biography exemplifies. There is remarkably little in *America in Black and White* about such positive race consciousness.

In order to move beyond race, we must first take race into account. This is the sentiment made famous by Justice Harry Blackmun in the 1978 case *Regents of the University of California v. Allan Bakke*, which permitted the practice of affirmative action in public higher education. An opposing idea is the notion that our Constitution is color-blind, making no distinctions among people on the basis of race. So Justice John Marshall Harlan claimed, in his lone dissent in the 1896 case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which found Jim Crow segregation to be consistent with the equal-protection clause

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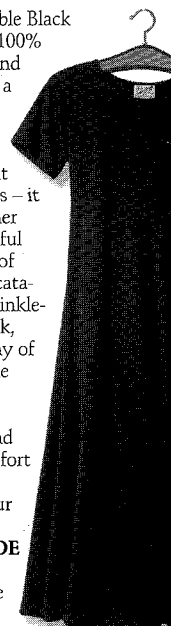
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of the Fourteenth Amendment. Constitutional lawyers left and right think that this debate is about reading the text and finding legal truth. The Thernstroms do a fair amount of that, on the conservative side of course, and the "truth" that emerges is what one would expect. But argument about the legality of government's use of race only scratches the surface. It fails to deal with the manifest significance of race in the private lives of Americans, black and white. I agree with the Thernstroms that the institutionalization of racial preference over the past generation has done harm, to blacks and to the country, and that it needs reform. But I find simplistic in the extreme what amounts to their invitation to blacks to "just get over it."

It is ironic that a statue named Liberty oversaw the arrival in New York's harbor of millions of foreigners, "tempest tossed" and "yearning to breathe free," even as southern black peasants—not alien, just profoundly alienated—languished unfree at the social margins. It is surely ironic that a racist ideology openly questioning the Negro's human worth, shaping whites' views of blacks and blacks' views of themselves, survived our defeat of the Nazis and abated only when Cold War rivalry made it intolerable that the "leader of the free world" should be seen to preside over a regime of racial subordination. And now, surely in part because of this ignoble history, some black districts in the middle of our great cities vie for the dubious distinction of being the most despairing places in the industrial world. Meanwhile, political and intellectual elites respond by giving increasing voice to their weariness with the race issue, pointing to the comparative success of recent nonwhite immigrants, and longing for the coming of a postracial America. This has the makings of national tragedy.

In the brave new dispensation "color" is supposed to be irrelevant, yet everywhere we look in America, people are attending assiduously to race. The most recent U.S. Census revealed that among married people twenty-five to thirty-four years old in 1990, 70 percent of Asian women and 39 percent of Hispanic women but only two percent of black women had white husbands. Talk about the

threat of "black crime" is a staple in suburbia. Racially mixed church congregations are so rare that they make front-page news. So culturally isolated are black ghetto teens that linguists find their speech patterns to be converging across great geographic distances, even as this emergent dialect grows increasingly dissimilar to the speech of poor whites living but a few miles away. Conservative advocates of school vouchers—ever opponents of affirmative action, but aware that the persuasiveness of their demonstration can be enhanced by the race of its beneficiaries—select impoverished black communities in which to showcase the virtues of choice. Childless white couples travel to Colombia and Vietnam in search of infants to adopt while ghetto-born orphans go parentless. True enough, some blacks have tried to impede transracial adoptions. But more pertinent is the fact that the social pitfalls facing adoptive parents are greater for black-white than for other mixed-race families, and this discourages white adoption of black babies.

This litany is not a brief for color-conscious public policies, nor is it an indictment of American society for being irredeemably racist. What these examples illustrate is how deeply imbedded in the social consciousness of our nation is the racial "otherness" of blacks, and how important this inherited stigma can be in determining the extent of black opportunity. Astute external observers have always stressed this. In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville remarked about early-nineteenth-century America that "the prejudice rejecting the Negroes . . . [causes] inequality [to cut] deep into mores as it is effaced from the laws." A century later, observing southern society in the 1930s, Gunnar Myrdal stressed the importance of a "vicious circle" in which black failure justified for whites the very prejudicial attitudes that, when reflected in social and political action, led to black marginalization, and thereby helped to cause black failure. It is my conviction that subtle and complex social processes of this kind are at work among us even today, and that we desperately need intellectuals capable of analyzing such tragic, self-perpetuating processes while keeping their moral balance and avoiding the ideological cant of either left or right. ☼

All Ireland's Bard

Tied by birth to unionism, memorialist of the executed Nationalist rebels of 1916, W. B. Yeats mirrored Ireland's divisions in his self-divisions—yet saw the island as a single cultural entity sprung from common roots in common myths

by Seamus Heaney

W. B. YEATS:
A Life

by R. F. Foster.
Volume 1: The Apprentice Mage,
Oxford University Press,
640 pages, \$35.00.

ONE of the most celebrated literary landmarks in Ireland is "the auto-graph tree," in what was once the walled garden of Lady Augusta Gregory's estate at Coole Park, in County Galway. On the welter bark one can still make out the famous initials: WBY,

GBS, AE, and several more, including those of Violet Martin (the pseudonymous "Ross" of the Somerville and Ross writing partnership), who visited Coole in the summer of 1901, and wrote,

Yeats looks just what I expected. A cross between a Dominie Sampson and a starved R.C. curate—in seedy black clothes—with a large black bow at the root of his long naked throat. He is egregiously the poet—muttering ends of verse to himself with a wild eye, bows over your hand in dark silence—but poet he *is*—and very interesting indeed—and some-

how sympathetic to talk to—I liked him. . . . Augusta made me add my initials to a tree already decorated by Douglas Hyde, AE and more of the literary crowd. It was most touching. WBY did the carving, I smoked, and high literary conversation raged and the cigarette went out and I couldn't make the matches light, and he held the little dingy lappets of his coat out and I lighted the match in his bosom.

Already, at the age of thirty-six, Yeats was something of a legend. In his day-to-day life he presented a very deliberately composed profile to the world; in the course of his writing he equally deliberately re-presented himself. In the first schoolboy letter collected in the first volume of his correspondence he told about his efforts to walk on stilts (and provided a sketch of himself doing so), and from that point onward, right down to his final, valedictory poem, "Under Ben Bulbin," in which he put himself into the third person and into history as "Yeats," the compulsion was always the same—to raise himself to a new plane and a new power. His affectations, in other words, were just one consequence of his egregious need to manifest the artistic temperament. He famously declared that the man who sat down to breakfast was a bundle of accident and incoherence, whereas the man reborn in a poem was "intended" and "complete"; one way to see his life's work is as a pursuit of that intention of completeness. A writer's style, Yeats believed, is the equivalent of self-conquest, and he always envisaged his art as the reward of labor. The guardian angel of his "unchristened heart" was Plato's ghost.

His chosen comrades thought at school
He must grow a famous man;
He thought the same and lived by rule,
All his twenties crammed with toil;
"What then?" sang Plato's ghost.
"What then?"

The word "apprentice" in the subtitle of this magnificent first volume of Roy Foster's biography endorses the poet's view of himself as a toiling intelligence, a Dantesque spirit pushing toward ever higher levels of visionary understanding and stylistic mastery. But the word "mage" is a reminder that the stylistic was not the only kind of mastery that



Yeats sought. He would have liked to be able to boast with Shakespeare's Glendower that he could "call spirits from the vasty deep," and from his youth he committed himself intensely to the project of becoming an adept in the occult sciences. It was, for example, mediums rather than madams that he visited when he was in Paris in 1914, whereas twenty-seven years earlier, in London in 1887, he had found his way to Madam Blavatsky, one of the founders of the Theosophical Society, a personage who proved as attractive to the realist in him as to the occultist. He liked her Russian horse sense and perspicacity; she was "a sort of old Irish peasant woman with an air of humour and audacious power," a woman who could say, "I used to wonder at and pity the people who sell their souls to the Devil, but now I only pity them. They do it to have somebody on their side."

In Blavatsky's "humour and audacious power" Yeats was surely recognizing qualities he himself possessed, even though contemporaries would describe the humor as "saturnine" and see the power and audacity as part of a general inclination to take control of every enterprise in which he involved himself. Indeed, one of the many virtues of Foster's magisterial book is the way it keeps overwhelming the reader with a sense of Yeats's tirelessness as a mover and shaker at every level of his affairs—familial, cultural, sexual, political, artistic, amorous. A born publicist who was also a silence-seeking lyric poet, a self-made controversialist whose public stances often caused him much private pain, a heroic lover whose beloved desired him to abjure desire, a faithful friend with a habit of falling out with the ones who meant most to him, a cultural administrator and committeeman who did not believe in democracy in the arts, he always had his work cut out for him.

THE story of that work and of the man who did it has been told often, mainly along lines that Yeats himself dictated. Even during his lifetime the poet's detractors could not deny his central importance, and in affirming that importance after his death his advocates tended to take it as a more or less predestined phenomenon, as if all that W. B. had had to do was to await the artistic

and genetic implications of one of his father's boasts: J. B. Yeats had declared that by marrying one of the turbulent Pollexfens, he had given a voice to the sea cliffs. Obviously, the early work of biography and criticism done by Joseph Hone and A. N. Jeffares relied substantially on the poet's own autobiographical and creative writings, and this is also true of the epoch-making books by Richard Ellmann (whose definitive work on Yeats tends to be overlooked because of the immense success of his Joyce biography). For decades, therefore, the effort has been to establish and salute exactly what was "intended" and "completed" by this modern master, and the plane from which these surveys were conducted has always been one established by the writings of the poet himself. Consequently, the biographies have been of the "critical" kind, as much about "the work" as "the man."

W. H. Auden and T. S. Eliot set the mode of eulogy immediately, Auden accepting (metrically as well as in other ways) Yeats's deathbed version of himself as poetic oracle and ancestor, carrying on the beat of "Under Ben Bulbin" ("Follow, poet, follow right/To the bottom of the night"), and trying on the role. Eliot, on the other hand, in his memorial lecture at the Abbey Theatre in 1940, commemorated Yeats not as a Delphic voice but as an exemplary practitioner, one whose history was the history of his times, and thereby transferred to the dead archbard the kind of justifying claim that was then being made for his own peculiarly modern genius. The terms of Eliot's praise have often been cited and its justice recognized, but it is only with the publication of Roy Foster's life that the intensity and intimacy of Yeats's engagement with the life of his times can be fully appreciated.

Professor Foster is, among other things, a distinguished historian, and has already written a standard work on Charles Stewart Parnell and a much-lauded history of modern Ireland. He is identified as the most influential "revisionist" among contemporary Irish historians, which is to say that he, like his subject, has often been at the center of the culture wars. What the revisionists want to revise is a narrative put in place by successive generations of "Nationalist" historians which reads Irish history as the gradually

successful emergence of the Gaelic nation from foreign domination, culminating in the reinstatement of native government and the official recognition of the native language and majority religion after Irish independence was gained, in 1921. The imposition of this narrative, it is argued, suppresses other "varieties of Irishness" (especially those alloyed with Britishness), and is therefore detrimental to any move toward a more politically workable, culturally pluralist future for the country, north and south. The revisionists would espouse a new narrative, conducive to a reconciliation of all the traditions on the island; and, indeed, the currency of those very words—"reconciliation" and "traditions" (in the plural)—is a testimony to the way they have changed the intellectual climate during the past thirty years, a period in which the activities of the Provisional Irish Republican Army have been a vehement reminder of where the freedom narrative can lead.

Nobody, therefore, was better qualified to write this book, which follows Yeats into his fiftieth year, through a period of Irish history when all the questions about national and cultural affiliation that have come so desperately to the fore again in Northern Ireland were being lived through in the rest of the country at both private and public levels and leaving their indelible mark on Irish life. But it was precisely because these crucial tensions had come to the fore that Yeats, at fifty, began to set himself up as the representative Irish poet of his times—one whose ancestors included not only a soldier who had fought for William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne at the end of the seventeenth century but also a country scholar who was friends with the revolutionary Robert Emmet at the beginning of the nineteenth. By invoking these figures in 1914, in the introductory verses of a volume significantly titled *Responsibilities*, Yeats was reminding his Irish readership that he took the strain of both the major ideologies that were exacerbating Irish political life in that critically important year.

As a Yeats, he belonged to the respectable stratum of Protestant Irish society that owed its position and power to William of Orange's victory and its consequences—the establishment of an Anglo-Irish ascendancy and the institu-

tion of penal laws against the Catholic population. So as a Yeats he might have been expected to support the cause of the union of Ireland with the other British nations under the English crown. But as an Irish poet who had written a manifesto aligning himself with Irish Nationalist precursors such as Thomas Davis and James Clarence Mangan, as the author of the early, inflammatory "rebel" play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, as the chief inventor of the Celtic Twilight and a founding member of the Abbey Theatre, which claimed to be the country's national theater, Yeats had long been creating a vision of Ireland as an independent cultural entity, a state of mind as much as a nation-state, one founded on indigenous myths and attitudes and beliefs that pre-dated not only William of Orange but even Saint Patrick himself.

ALTHOUGH Yeats could manage his self-divisions skillfully enough in public, events were forcing him toward a new ordering of all his positions and dispositions. He might tell a questioner that he was not in the business of advancing Irish independence, and could only "prepare for the day after it has been obtained," but that was fundamentally a holding action. And what it held at bay was the deeply divisive question of the relationship that existed in Ireland between religious background and political predilection. The implications of this could usually be absorbed in the civilities of social life and the given conditions of constitutional politics, but when these given conditions were in crisis, as they were during the second decade of this century, the ideological silt on the bed of William's Boyne and at the foot of Emmet's gallows stirred and rose in the Irish psyche and endangered all consensus and civility.

A bill granting Home Rule to Ireland was under consideration in the British Houses of Parliament, and the minds of Irish Protestants in particular were greatly concentrated. As Foster reports, when Yeats was invited to propose a motion affirming faith in the tolerance of the Catholic Church, he returned an unmistakably negative (if private) answer.

There is intolerance in Ireland, it is the shadow of belief everywhere and

no priesthood of any church has lacked it. . . . how can I who have been denounced by Cardinal Logue for a romance [his early play *The Countess Cathleen*], and seen lying leaflets based on material sent from Dublin distributed at chapel doors in America during the tour of the Abbey Players . . . affirm that there is not both shadow and substance?

It was at this point that W. B. Yeats began one of his most important remakings of himself, which was to turn into a freedom narrative of sorts also. What was happening throughout his forties was a growing disenchantment with "advanced nationalism," the wing of the movement that at its most extreme was not averse to armed rebellion and at its most populist tended to assume that Catholic values and Irish nationality amounted to much the same thing. One symptom of this disenchantment was his gradual alienation from the Celticist and broadly propagandist milieu that he had embraced in his younger days and that had been created largely by his own efforts. Thus the Abbey Theatre came to define itself against a more politically composed and motivated theater such as the Theatre of Ireland, and J. M. Synge's masterpiece, *The Playboy of the Western World*, came to represent the kind of untrammelled, radically unaligned work that the Abbey's three famous directors—Synge, Gregory, and Yeats—wished to espouse and promote. But this kind of work could also be decried as something that "besmirched the name of Irish womanhood" and could be read as condescension, perhaps even a deliberate attack by the Protestant directorate upon the Catholic morality and piety of the whole country. Thus high artistic purpose was by no means a prophylactic against the prevalent sectarian conditions.

INEXORABLY, therefore, Yeats was drawn to a haughtier attitude, and before long a whole rethinking of his relationship to the traditions of Anglo-Ireland was under way. This would entail a switch of allegiance from folk culture to high culture, and would be accompanied by a corresponding shift in his social and political attitudes. So, for example, the cottages in Kiltartan where he had once gathered folklore with Lady Gregory were now referred to as

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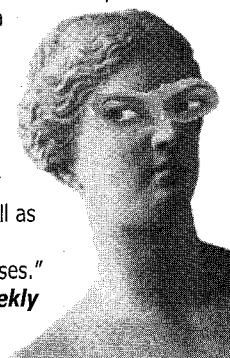
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"mean roof-trees," and Irish Catholics who in the 1880s and 1890s might have been called "the children of the Gael" were now lumped under the far more demeaning names of "Paudeen" and "Biddy." These developments, combined with a reading of Nietzsche and the naturally increasing solitude of middle age, intensified his search for "completeness" and set Yeats to work on the first of his great series of autobiographical essays, "Reveries Over Childhood and Youth," which he completed just at the point where *The Apprentice Mage* comes to an end.

In these reveries and in subsequent installments Yeats created an enduring profile of himself as a noble poet working toward high national (and supranational) purposes, a profile that Foster does not wish to alter; he also created "Yeats country" through a loving evocation of the Sligo where he spent so much of his early life, under the mountains of Ben Bulbin and Knocknarea, and along the shores of Lough Gill; and he drew vivid portraits of those who would be transformed by his poetry into "all the Olympians": John O'Leary, the old Fenian who had directed the young Yeats toward Irish themes and backgrounds; the Pollexfens and Middletons of Sligo; the aforementioned writers and colleagues at the Abbey; and, of course, Maud Gonne, who transfigured his emotional life, got him entangled with revolutionary politics, was his mystic bride for years before she became (briefly) his bodily mate, and generally elevated his sense of personal and poetic destiny. What the whole story amounts to is the creation myth of one who lived a passionate and singularly individual life, who sought solidarity only to find it constricting, who praised the virtues of consensus but was actually far more animated by combat, whose conduct as poet and citizen was (as he said of Gonne) of "a kind/That is not natural in an age like this,/Being high and solitary and most stern."

A sentence like the previous one turns a life into a set of phrases, and that is what much biographical writing aspires to do—to translate a consciousness and a personal history into a style, to interpret what happened rather than set it forth. What Roy Foster attempts, however, is much rarer, much more difficult, and (from the reader's point of view) much

riskier. Foster is intent on creating a record as well as a "reading"; his method is to let the myriad facts that he places before us speak for themselves—although it must be said that when he does permit himself the luxury of a personal touch, things perk up very cheerfully indeed, as when he suggests that Maud Gonne's Dublin Castle acquaintances might have regarded her attraction to republican politics as a "sort of *trahison des débütantes*." The risk lies in not providing more of this kind of charm and flourish, but the author is prepared to run it, because of a lovely sense of decorum, a feeling that his book is an epic of service to its subject, not a vehicle for his own personality or opinions. It is a mighty argosy of scholarship, dauntingly in possession of all that has been said and written by and about this astonishing poet and genius. It is very deliberately a historian's book, almost all life and no criticism. It goes at a slow pace, a cargoed galleon set deep in the water, a work of huge significance because it is intellectually equal to its subject and intuitively at one with him, since Foster's own preoccupation is with the old Yeatsian question of how Ireland, a country of deep political division and high cultural potential, might still properly define itself.

THE book will be definitive because of the amount of old and new research it garners, letting us know when the poet first smoked hashish or slept with Maud Gonne, letting us into the sadness surrounding the poet's withdrawn mother and into the domestic poverty that his siblings faced with such resource and resilience. But Foster's main achievement is to give us a precise sense of Yeats (and people like the Yeats family) as part of the drama of Irish history; in fact, it may be that this biography will be more effective than any of Foster's previous writings in persuading readers of the necessity for inclusiveness when imagining a new Ireland. Foster presents the Yeats family as a marginalized group within the already historically marginalized Anglo-Irish, all of them in need of reintegration into a larger and more positively future-seeking whole, and what he has to say about this scenario will speak to everyone who has endured the state of crisis that has persisted in Ireland since 1968. His story of a con-

sciousness stretched, as Czeslaw Milosz said of himself, between "the contemplation of a motionless point and the command to participate actively in history" will strike all Irish readers as a form of remembrance.

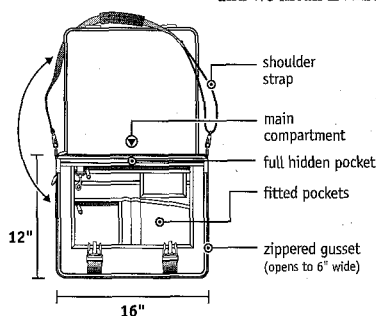
So this is a book for the times, but not just the Irish times. However revolted Yeats would eventually feel at the onset of the "filthy modern tide," many of his own insights and strategies look forward to the flightier waftings and draftings of the postmodern. He was always in tune with the idea of the instability of the self, of consciousness as a site where many moods, voices, selves, spirits, presences—call them what you will—visited and vanished. His sense that poetic vocation entailed an election to nobility and its obligations strengthened the image he had of himself as a chosen vehicle of principle and impulse. But he also conceived of himself as a testing ground where principles and impulses would have to fight it out, and this meant that he was more prepared than most to admit his contradictions. Enjoined by his calling to live freely and truly, he gave full rein to what was passionate in his sensibility and skeptical in his intelligence; he could be majestic in public and mocking in private, self-absorbed and vigilant in turn, tactical and obstinate, clandestine and confrontational, down-to-earth and elevated. Yet these were symptoms not of an absence of coherence but of an appetite for abundance; in fact, the coherence lay in his determination to live more extravagantly than "the merchant and the clerk," and the honesty of perception and expression that this determination compelled turned him not only into a great artist but also into a great observer and reporter of the world and its inhabitants.

One of the incidental pleasures of these pages is the constant stimulation of the wily remarks and up-front judgments that Yeats made with such accuracy and relish. Early on, for example, he expressed a liking for Ernest Rhys, because, unlike most literary men, he "had no 'bon mots' and several convictions." Winston Churchill, encountered years later at a weekend house party, seemed "a mixture of ungraciousness and geniality." G.R.S. Mead, a member of the Blavatsky circle, had "the intellect of a good sized wheel." And at the funeral of

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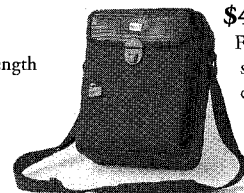
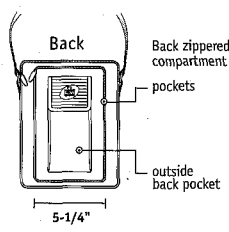
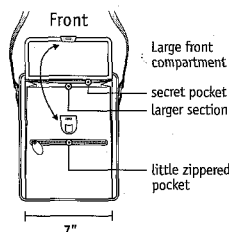
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his uncle, George Pollexfen, so many strange people turned up that it was "like the dredging of a pond." But as attractive as this off-the-cuffness can be, the real attraction of Yeats lies in the essential nobility of his mind, the way he combined ardor with rigor, the ideal of service behind and beneath the self-centeredness and the attitudinizing. "Why do I write all this?" he asked, after he had administered a well-deserved rebuke to himself in his journal for failing to take on Edmund Gosse (Gosse had written insultingly to Lady Gregory), and replied,

I suppose that I may learn at last to keep to my own [values and instincts] in every situation in life; to discover and create in myself as I grow old that thing which is to life what style is to letters: moral radiance, a personal quality of universal meaning in action and in thought.

It was this pursuit of radiance, of a crystalline purity of motive and conduct, that redeemed much of the egotism and the codology. Another incidental strength of Foster's writing lies in his natural sympathy not only for his subject but also for those who had to put up with him; he takes cognizance of their attitudes, ranging from the debunking to the malicious, concedes their justice, and yet does not allow them to demean Yeats's essentially beneficent, astonishingly sustained exercise of creative power. In fact, *The Apprentice Mage* triumphantly confounds the poet's own negative estimate of scholars: "Lord," Yeats once exclaimed in a poem about them, "what would they say/Did their Catullus walk that way?" Not only does Roy Foster understand the Catullus element in Yeats (he is particularly beguiling, for example, when communicating the physiotherapeutic charms of Yeats's Dublin Lesbia, Mabel Dickinson); he also convinces us that by the end of the next volume his scholarship and "sedentary trade" will have produced a biography that should go far toward satisfying even Plato's implacable ghost.

"The work is done," grown old he thought,
 "According to my boyish plan;
 Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
 Something to perfection brought";
 But louder sang that ghost, "What then?"

Feminism's Unfinished Business

by Katha Pollitt

SPEAKING OF SEX: The Denial of Gender Inequality

by Deborah Rhode.
 Harvard University Press,
 341 pages, \$29.95.

IT takes a real talent for overlooking the obvious to argue that women have achieved equality in contemporary America. After all, despite thirty years of feminist activism and much social change, virtually every important political, social, cultural, and economic institution is still dominated by men: legislatures, courts, corporations, labor unions, the news and entertainment media, education, science, medicine, religion. Study after study shows that women make less money than men even when they do the same or similar work, which they have a hard time getting; that they shoulder the bulk of child-rearing and housework, even in families where both husband and wife work full-time; that they are on the receiving end of a great deal of rape, domestic violence, abuse, and harassment. The pervasiveness of sexism is by now widely acknowledged, even on occasion in venues that are hostile to the organized women's movement: it was *The Wall Street Journal*, whose editorial page regularly inveighs against feminism as a form of "political correctness" and "social engineering," that in 1995 prominently featured the news that parents give daughters smaller allowances and more chores than they give sons. Riffing through my magazine basket on a slow day recently, I learned from *Science News* that scientifically gifted high school girls are more likely to drop out of the field in college than are comparable boys; from *The Washington Post* that most health-care plans won't pay for contraceptives; and from *The New Republic* that forced marriages and other oppressive customs

persist in some immigrant communities without much objection from the legal system.

But if the evidence is all around us, why doesn't everybody see it—or see it for what it is? In recent years a seemingly endless parade of social critics have achieved celebrity by portraying not sexism but feminism as the problem. Some frankly glorify male dominance, among them Camille Paglia, who being a woman can say things—that the California high school date-rape gang known as the Spur Posse is "beautiful," for example—that might make even Rush Limbaugh blanch. Others, such as Christina Hoff Sommers, Katie Roiphe, and the conservative Independent Women's Forum, argue that feminism has completed its real job—overturning formal and legal barriers to equal treatment—so women are either already equal (more or less) or don't wish to be, and all evidence to the contrary is false or trivial. Either way, women who feel victimized should, as Mary Matalin puts it, "stop whining!"

Deborah Rhode, a professor of law at Stanford University and the president-elect of the Association of American Law Schools, thinks the problem is that women—and men who care about them—don't whine enough. Women's second-class status, what Betty Friedan once called "the problem that has no name," has become "the 'no problem' problem." In *Speaking of Sex*, Rhode sets herself two tasks: to document gender inequality—separate chapters cover child-rearing, the media, sexual violence, work, and marriage and divorce—and to understand why so many of us are "in denial" about it. Although Rhode breaks little new ground, the sheer accumulation of data and her cogent analyses make this an excellent guide to sexism in our time. Exhaustively footnoted and sourced (seventy-nine pages of notes for 250 of text), it is unlike most general-interest books on any side of this debate in that it draws on a vast amount of real scholarship and ranges widely over the available literature in and out of academia. Although Rhode is not an exciting writer—her attempts at humor are mostly quotations from others (including, I should mention, me)—her calm, lawyerly, methodical approach lets the material speak for itself. And it does.

WE all know that divorced mothers are rarely awarded enough child support to cover the real costs of raising a child as a single parent, that toys are stereotypically sex-typed, that teachers call more often on boys. But did you know that "individuals give lower ratings to the same resumes, scholarly articles, or artistic works when they carry a female rather than a male name"? That "30 to 50 percent of surveyed Americans . . . believe that women are to blame for rape if they dress provocatively"? That Hispanic female college graduates earn less, on average, than white male high school dropouts? That when an ABC documentary team sent a man and a woman with equal credentials to apply for the same advertised jobs, he got managerial offers and she got typing tests?

The picture that emerges from the hundreds of similar facts gathered here is pretty depressing, and even I, a connoisseur of bad news, wondered occasionally if Rhode wasn't determined not to look on the bright side. Which, for example, is more significant: kindergarten "graduation awards" that singled out girls as "All-Around Sweetheart" and "Cutest Personality" and boys as "Very Best Thinker" and "Most Eager Learner," or the fact that a father protested and the episode made headlines—in *The Wall Street Journal*? In her discussion of child custody Rhode contends that mothers who don't fit the 1950s chaste-homebody stereotype are at a disadvantage, and that fathers get more credit than mothers for the same level of involvement with their children, and I believe her, because I hear these attitudes expressed in casual conversation fairly often. All her examples, however, are of widely publicized legal outrages: the judge who took custody from a lesbian mother and gave it to the father, a convicted murderer; the judge who barred a custodial mother from letting her male partner sleep over; the judge who transferred custody to a previously uninvolved father because the mother, a college student, enrolled her toddler in day care. Representative cases, or flukes, or something in between? More significant than these shocking anecdotes are studies suggesting that 20 percent of divorcing husbands use the threat of a custody fight to obtain financial concessions, and that half of Massachusetts judges surveyed believe that a mother

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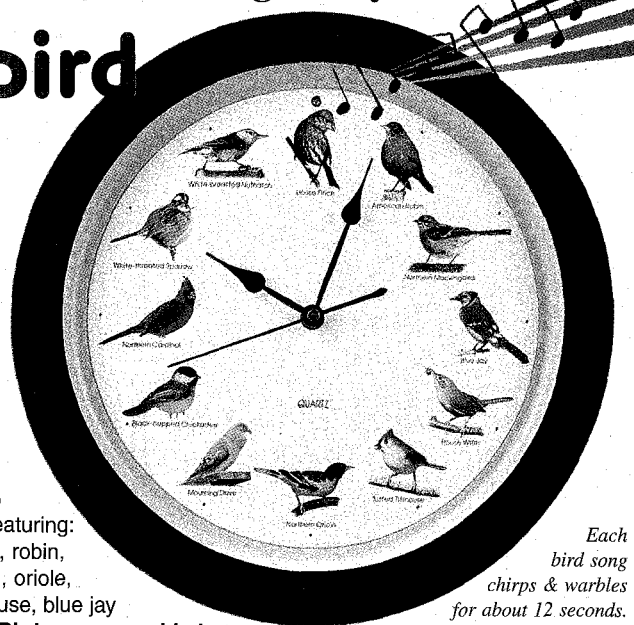
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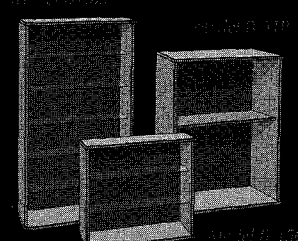
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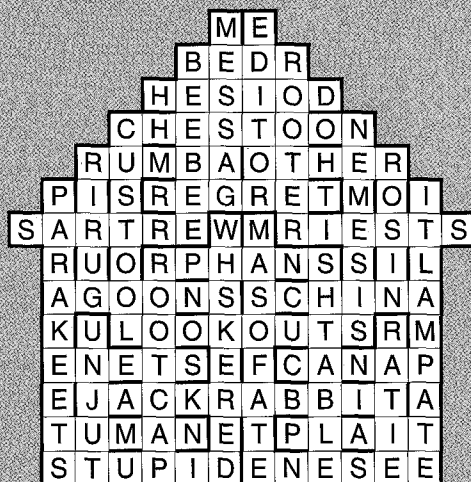
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should be home when school lets out, and many would shift custody to the father if she isn't.

So why is gender inequality the no-problem problem? Rhode sees three kinds of denial at work. People fail to see how unequal women are, or they see it but "rationalize [it] as the result of women's own choices and capacities," or they see it but believe they have no responsibility to work for change. Doubtless there's much truth to this analysis. Many people have a hard time seeing that lifting a prohibition is a far cry from making something accessible or even possible, whether it's an equal shot at tenure or an abortion (some studies show that one in five women seeking an abortion is frustrated by economic or legal hurdles—those "undue burdens" theoretically forbidden by Supreme Court rulings). For many reasons, too, and in many areas of life, Americans have a curiously shallow understanding of the relationship of the individual to society: we greatly underestimate the role of social forces in making us what we are and in limiting our real, as opposed to abstract, choices. We tell ourselves that obstacles exist to be overcome, citing the handful of people who manage to overcome them as proof that everyone could if she chose. Moreover, in all fairness, some patterns of gender bias are genuinely hard to see: perhaps I, too, give my daughter a smaller allowance than I would give her if she were a boy—but since I don't have a son, how can I tell? If you don't know how much your colleagues earn (a taboo subject in the American workplace), how do you know if you're being underpaid because of your sex? As Rhode points out, lots of decisions—who gets a promotion, who wins a prize—are close calls involving many factors. If each decision seems reasonable, it may not be easy to pinpoint the bias, even if the overall pattern heavily favors men.

RHODE'S psychological perspective also leaves out a lot, however. Gender inequality is, after all, not just a social phenomenon about which people have more or less carefully reasoned and well-informed ideas, such as they have about capital punishment, or gun control, or the draft. It's one of the fundamental aspects of the American social and economic system. Not only psychological

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Down: 1. MESS + A + GE 2. EDIT(O)R (tired anag.) 3. BEE + BEE 4. ROOTER (anag.) 6. CU + BED 7. NEM + E + SIS (men rev.) 8. RICH)EST 10. ROSIN(g) 11. P(A + RAKE)ETS (step rev.) 13. IT'S TOO LATE (anag.) 15. WHISKE(y) + RED 16. MA(CH + IN + A)TE 18. ROOT CAP (anag.) 19. S(HR)UG (Gus rev.) 22. UN + JUST 24. RATITE (anag.)

comfort but actual concrete interests are at stake. To equalize the standings of men and women would cost billions of dollars, require the overhaul of many institutions, and destabilize many kinds of personal and professional relationships. It would threaten many men, and some women, with increased competition, while depriving men as a group of the important psychological bonus of feeling superior to women. There would be losers as well as winners. This would all be true whether or not people denied the existence of gender inequality, just as economic inequality exists independent of our fitful bouts of awareness of it. Denial is not an explanation of a social fact but an adaptation to it.

And do most people even deny that gender inequality exists? The studies Rhode mentions suggest that denial is mostly the privilege of those who benefit, or hope to benefit, from the status quo. Judges may be astonished when state commissions publish reports documenting widespread discrimination against women in the legal system (the male judge who co-chaired California's Gender Bias Task Force joked, "Until I was on this . . . Task Force, there was never any bias in my court"). I suspect that female lawyers, witnesses, plaintiffs, and defendants are rather less thunderstruck. More than 90 percent of female senior managers believe that men's and women's opportunities remain unequal; 40 to 50 percent of female workers believe that an old-boy network persists, and that they would have higher salaries if they were men. These figures and many others—the large numbers of women who report having experienced sexual harassment, for example—suggest that plenty of women see their circumstances rather plainly. At least in surveys, it's men who hold rosy beliefs about equality, like the two thirds of fathers in one study who claimed to share child care equally with their wives—an outcome wildly inconsistent with virtually all the research, not to mention the experience of most mothers.

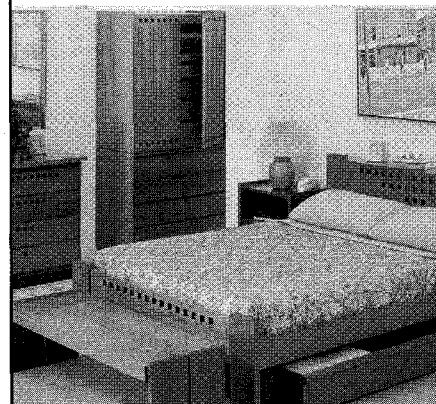
That last item raises the question of how much denial is sincere and how much is a matter of convenience or rhetorical strategy or political agenda. When Alan Dershowitz, not only a famous trial lawyer but also an immensely knowledgeable professor of law, claims that rape is "the most overreported serious

crime in America" because 8.4 percent of reported rapes are "unfounded," one suspects he knows that "unfounded" means not false or fabricated but failing to meet the legal statute, lacking in the kind of evidence that fits the requirements of the law, or unlikely to prevail in court—hardly the same thing. (As Rhode says, the overwhelming consensus among researchers using government statistics is that only two percent of rape complaints are false—no more than for other crimes.) Similarly, the conservative antifeminist pundits and talking heads who are all over the news media right now—Laura Ingraham, Mona Charen, Christina Hoff Sommers—represent mostly themselves and the right-wing think tanks and foundations that fund them. Rhode is concerned that out of 90 million adult American women, only 250,000 belong to the National Organization for Women—but maybe this says less about women's denial of sexism than it does about NOW. In any case, only about a thousand belong to Laura Ingraham's home base, the Independent Women's Forum, an anti-feminist group that claims to favor women's rights.

Rhode's hope is that people awakened to gender injustice will take action against it. I share her hope, but a century of muck-raking journalism should have taught us the limits of this model for social change. America is full of certifiably innocent victims whose desperate straits persist despite repeated publicity: the homeless mentally ill, children in foster care, old people confined to substandard nursing homes. People seem able to live with a considerable amount of awareness of other people's hard luck—and even of their own. Feminism is, after all, no more stymied—and maybe less—than movements that seek a fairer piece of the pie for African-Americans, labor, or the 70 percent of Americans whose wages have stagnated or eroded over the past two decades. Why so many people are politically passive, and under what conditions they might rouse themselves, are fascinating questions, but I don't think the concept of denial will take us far toward an answer. The problem is not so much, as Rhode argues, that people mistakenly believe the world is just; actually, only the privileged think that. It's that they believe they are powerless. And much of the time they're right.

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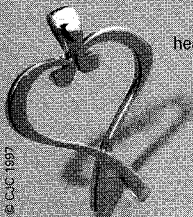
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The rather tepid kinds of action that Rhode urges on her readers underscore this powerlessness: angry letters; consumer boycotts of products that are sexist or advertised in ways insulting to women; contributions to feminist organizations, which will presumably lobby for the "model initiatives" and "projects" she believes will point the way toward wider change. None of these are bad ideas, exactly. But they're not likely to draw in new troops or energize old soldiers for a renewed assault on inequality—who joins a social movement in order to get a form letter back from a senator? And if inequality is as pervasive and entrenched as Rhode argues, these activities aren't going to make enough of a difference. Rhode herself seems to understand that women's inequality is tied to other features of the status quo: she explains Congress's inattention to gender justice with Pat Schroeder's observation "There's no money in women's issues." But this moment of realism yields immediately to a renewed bout of wishful thinking: feminists, Rhode suggests, must therefore make a "central priority" of campaign-finance reform, that elephants' graveyard for civic-minded activists.

What would a revitalized feminist movement look like? What made the

movement so compelling in the 1970s was in part the clarity of the demand it made on America to live up to its own values: fair play, equal treatment under the law, respect for individual merit and difference and so forth, and the responsibility of government to ensure that women receive an equal helping of these important social goods. This is the strand of feminism Rhode emphasizes, as one would expect a law professor to do, and it's clear that we still have a long way to go in making even these modest goals a reality. But there was another, more radical side to the movement, which had to do with the promise feminism held out to women of a life not just with more justice but also with more freedom, more self-respect, more choices, and more pleasure. Feminism promised that one could become more conscious of the social forces limiting one's life, and that from this new awareness positive change could come. That is what the much-maligned slogan "The personal is political" meant. This aspect of feminism was the opposite of "model initiatives" and sending in \$50 so that someone else could be paid to lobby by your congressman to vote your way on a few high-profile bills. It was a do-it-yourself, direct-action social movement. It might take a revival of this spirit to get us beyond "denial." ☘

BRIEF REVIEWS



Toward the End of Time

by John Updike.

Knopf, 352 pages, \$25.00.

Mr. Updike's latest novel opens with a first snowfall and a disagreement between the narrator, a retired financial adviser, and his still very active wife. Ben Turnbull wants to relax and enjoy the natural world. She wants the property to resemble a parquet floor. These people are living, however, in the year 2020.

There has been a disastrous Sino-American nuclear war. The remnants of the federal government are holed up somewhere, sending out tax bills that nobody pays. Massachusetts does local business with a scrip called welders. The novel purports to be Ben's journal. There are elements of magic realism in the text, and a few borrowings from science fiction, but futuristic fantasy is the book's basic character. It combines melancholy reflections on the passage of time with the author's mischievously idiosyncratic

notions of what will survive Ragnarök. The list includes nagging wives, *National Geographic*, the North Shore commuter line, opportunistic crime, the pursuit of young girls by old boys, UPS, and the telephone, on which mechanical voices continue to order the pushing of buttons that lead ad infinitum to other mechanical voices. Ben considers history and golf games. He meditates on black holes and his health. He records weather and seasons with precision and lyrical appreciation. He observes that "if not magical, men are not much," and describes a corpse as "this slumped puddle of deactivated molecules." He becomes, without warning or explanation, a man of other times and places. Altogether, he is a fascinating, amusing, eloquent companion, and one feels genuine regret when the year, his journal, and with them Mr. Updike's novel come to an end.

A Floating Life: The Adventures of Li Po

by Simon Elegant.
Ecco, 312 pages, \$23.00.

The great Chinese poet Li Po (701-762) was an artistic innovator and a recalcitrant who spent much of his life unemployed or in exile. Mr. Elegant's fictionalized life of Li Po is a swashbuckling picaresque tale, good reading even if one has doubts about the poet's claim that he rode home on the back of an eagle. His complaints about that old bore Confucius, phony scholarship, court etiquette, and the straitjacket rules of Mandarin verse ring true.

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle

by Haruki Murakami,
translated by Jay Rubin.
Knopf, 640 pages, \$26.50.

Mr. Murakami's long and devious novel opens in a resolutely mundane way, with the narrator cooking spaghetti. The significant items in the ensuing phantasmagoria soon appear, however—a dry well, a house abandoned because of a series of tragedies, a so-called alley blocked at both ends, the statue of a bird looking sadly unable to fly, and the unidentified wind-up bird that creaks invisibly in a nearby tree. "Wind-up" can mean either an end or a preparation for action. Whether his target is Japan or

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The Golan Heights

To Whom Do They Belong? Can Israel Survive Without Them?

Now that Gaza and part of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") have been turned over to the Palestinians, the clamor for peace with Syria becomes ever more strident. Hafez Assad, Syria's president, has left no doubt, and it is generally understood that he will not make peace with Israel unless the Golan is returned to him in its entirety and without any conditions.

What are the facts?

Historical Background—The Golan was always part of the Jewish homeland. The Syrian claim to the Golan is tenuous. Syria, as a political entity, did not exist at all until after the first World War.

Even before the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Syrians subjected the villages in northern Israel to almost daily shelling, making normal life impossible. In the 1967 Six-Day War, Syria attacked Israel and was defeated. Israel occupied the Golan Heights and in 1981, for all practical purposes annexed the area.

Syria and its President—Syria is the most destabilizing influence in the Middle East. It is classified by the U.S. State Department as a narcotic-dealing and terrorist state. Its main fury is directed at Israel, which is perceived as a bulwark of Western influence and civilization, both of which Syria totally rejects.

Syria's President, Hafez Assad, is a tyrant, every bit as ruthless as Saddam Hussein. Syria is a world center for terrorism. It still harbors Nazi bigwigs, who found welcome there after the World War. Few doubt that Assad was the mastermind in the suicide attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut in which 241 Americans died, and in the explosion of Pan Am flight #103 in which 270 people lost their lives. He oversees one of the largest narcotics operations in the world.

In its keen desire to bring peace to its people, after almost fifty years of war and bloodshed, Israel had been prepared to make far-reaching concessions to Syria on the Golan, in exchange for real peace. But Benjamin Netanyahu, who has promised his people *shalom batuach* (peace with security) is not prepared to give up all of the Golan and to return to the "death trap" borders of 1967 or anything close to them. In order to survive within such borders, Israel would have to rely on the goodwill of the Arab states, most of which—with the recent exception of Jordan and of the cold peace with Egypt—are still in a declared state of war with Israel. An aggressor will attack only if confident of victory. With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arabs could be confident of defeat, and peace would be preserved. To hand the Golan to Syria is a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction.

Military Security—The Golan is about the size of Queens, NY. If it were part of Syria it would be less than 1% of its territory. But it is of a supreme strategic importance to Israel. Its high ground provides early-warning capability, without which Israel would be subject to surprise attack by the Syrians. Its loss would obligate Israel to maintain a state of mobilization that would be economically and socially untenable. On the Golan itself, there are only two natural bottlenecks through which tanks can advance. Those choke points are defensible and made possible the repulse of

1400 Syrian tanks that attacked Israel in the 1973 war. But with the Golan in Syrian hands, and without the radar installations that would give Israel

warning of any military movements, thousands of tanks—backed up by missiles and airplanes—could overrun Israel in a matter of hours. The Golan does not make for perfect defense, but it gives Israel a small breathing space for mobilization.

The Golan is the source of over one-third of Israel's fresh water. In 1964, with the Golan in Syrian hands, Syria attempted to divert these headwaters and to cripple Israel's water supply. It is more than likely that, given another opportunity, Syria would once again attempt to destroy Israel's water supply.

"With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arabs could be confident of defeat and peace would be preserved. To hand the Golan to Syria is a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction."

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the world, Mr. Murakami's work sums up a bad century and envisions an uncertain future. His protagonist is a harmless fellow who merely wants to recover his cat and his wife. The troubles, real and delusional, that he encounters can be seen as extravagant metaphors for every ill from personal isolation to mass murder. The novel is a deliberately confusing, illogical image of a confusing, illogical world. It is not easy reading, but it is never less than absorbing.

**Philippe,
Duc d'Orléans**

by Christine Pevitt.
Atlantic Monthly Press,
384 pages, \$30.00.

When Louis XIV realized that he would be succeeded by a five-year-old great-grandson, he drew up a will specifying the personnel of the inevitable council of regency and their individual duties. His raffish nephew, Philippe d'Orléans, swept that will aside and took control of the government. His enemies accused D'Orléans of treason, murder, incest, the manufacture of poisons, and persistent debauchery. Ms. Pevitt argues that he deserved much better than that while admitting, with regret, that he remains an enigmatic figure despite her extensive research. The problem is the nature of the surviving evidence. The biographer can report what was done, but very seldom exactly why it was done. On the other hand, she has a mass of information on matters like diamond-trimmed shoes and the formal nightly delivery of the royal chamber pot to the King of Spain. One sometimes has the impression that the play is going on behind the curtain, but there is no doubt that Ms. Pevitt has provided a well-written and convincing defense. Besides, she has Voltaire on her side. He was once jailed by the regent, but maintained that Philippe "left the country better, richer and happier than it had been under Louis XIV, and even quite considerable sums in the King's coffers," and also that of all the descendants of Henri IV, Philippe d'Orléans was most like him, with "the courage, the good nature, the tolerance, the gaiety, the intelligence, the plain speaking . . ." Can one ask for a better character reference?

—Phoebe-Lou Adams

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WORD COURT

by Barbara Wallraff

Would you please discuss near miss to describe the non-collision of planes or other objects? Near hit or close call would be accurate, because there was, after all, a miss.

Ray Mueller
Chilton, Wis.

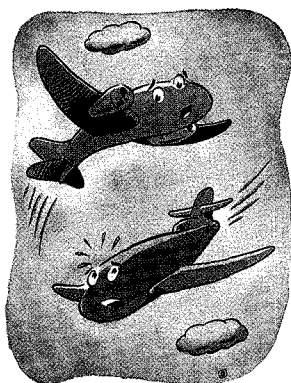
Dictionaries now tend to give *near miss* an entry of its own, because the meaning of the expression is indeed not apparent from the meanings of its component words. It's in there all the same: *near* means not only "almost a," as in *near replica*, but also "a particularly intimate kind of," as in *near relative*. The latter, less common sense of the word is the one that pertains in *near miss*.

I have been bothered lately by writers, especially those of scientific articles, comparing objects in terms of negative qualities. For example, a certain star will be described as ten times fainter than another. Unless this is a convention agreed upon lately, I just can't think what it could mean. How much faintness does a star have, and if another has ten times as much, how bright does that make it? Or if one

star is one time fainter than another, wouldn't that make it have zero brightness?

Melvin F. Moore
Jackson, Tenn.

Even when the quality in question isn't negative, the construction you're referring to is a bad idea. Think of *ten times brighter*, for example. We all know what that's supposed to mean, but then what's *one time brighter*?



You'd think it would mean *twice as bright*—so *ten times brighter* must be *eleven times as bright*? This way madness lies. *Ten times as bright as* is how it needs to be said, and making such a revision is usually painless. As you note, when the quality is negative, it only makes matters worse. A *tenth as bright* is much, much clearer than *ten times fainter*.

A member of the Friday Night Couples League at the Wenham Country Club, on Boston's North Shore, had a hole in one on the third hole and another on the fifth. Did he have two holes in one or two hole in ones? One of us believes that the pattern should be the same as in attorneys general and passersby. The other disagrees, believing that holes in one would indicate that the golfer gained multiple holes in one shot. A Diet Coke has been wagered on this, and we have agreed that Ms. Grammar shall be the final authority.

Nelson Benton
Peabody, Mass.

Dan Ryan
Beverly, Mass.

I admit I explained this past May that we needn't consider men who rely on their wives to be bigamists, and in fact, if they relied on *their wife*, then she would be one. But sometimes it's just impossible to match all parts of a sentence or a phrase in terms of grammatical or conceptual number. Or, rather, in trying to match them one may run afoul of some other rule, and then, usually, that rule should hold sway. Here the rule is that the main noun itself, and not incidentals attached to it, is pluralized. Even *RBI's*, when they're spelled out, become *runs*

batted in. *Holes in one* is correct, at least technically.

I must admit, though, that to say "two holes in one" is to ask to be misunderstood. There simply must be some other way to say it. How about "a hole in one twice"—and two glasses of Coke?

President Bill Clinton is fond of telling us he will "grow the economy," and now other bureaucrats use the phrase. Corporate types are checking in with a "need to grow our business." What they mean, of course, is expand the economy or business. Although their usage may conform to a literal definition of grow, to my ear it sounds straight out of Dogpatch. What do you think?

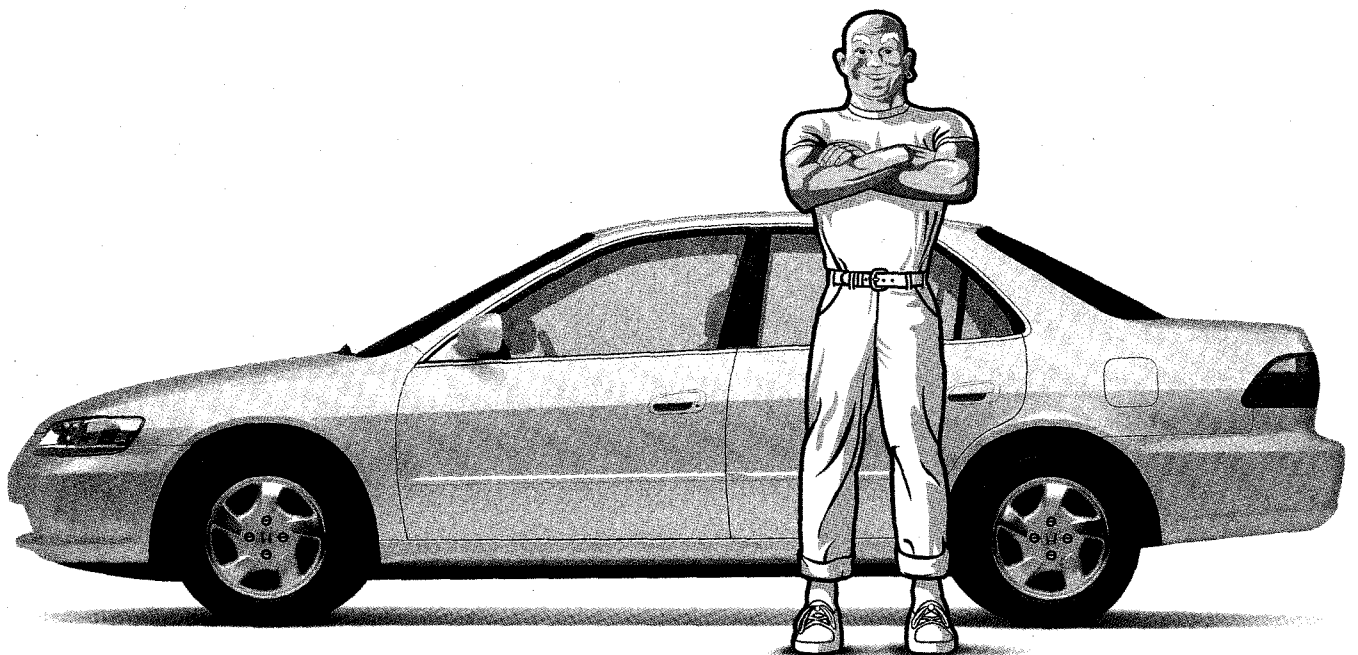
Jeffery Viles
Columbia, Mo.

This isn't something that we can blame President Clinton for. *Grow* has been cropping up hither and yon for at least 500 years. Nonetheless, having conducted a straw poll among young men who wear earrings as well as older ones in bow ties and women in stockings and pumps, I can say with confidence that your ear has plenty of company: the transitive verb in inanimate contexts is widely reviled. It's fine for people to *grow* roses or *grow* their hair, but they should *expand* or *strengthen* economies, businesses, and, if need be, their vocabularies.



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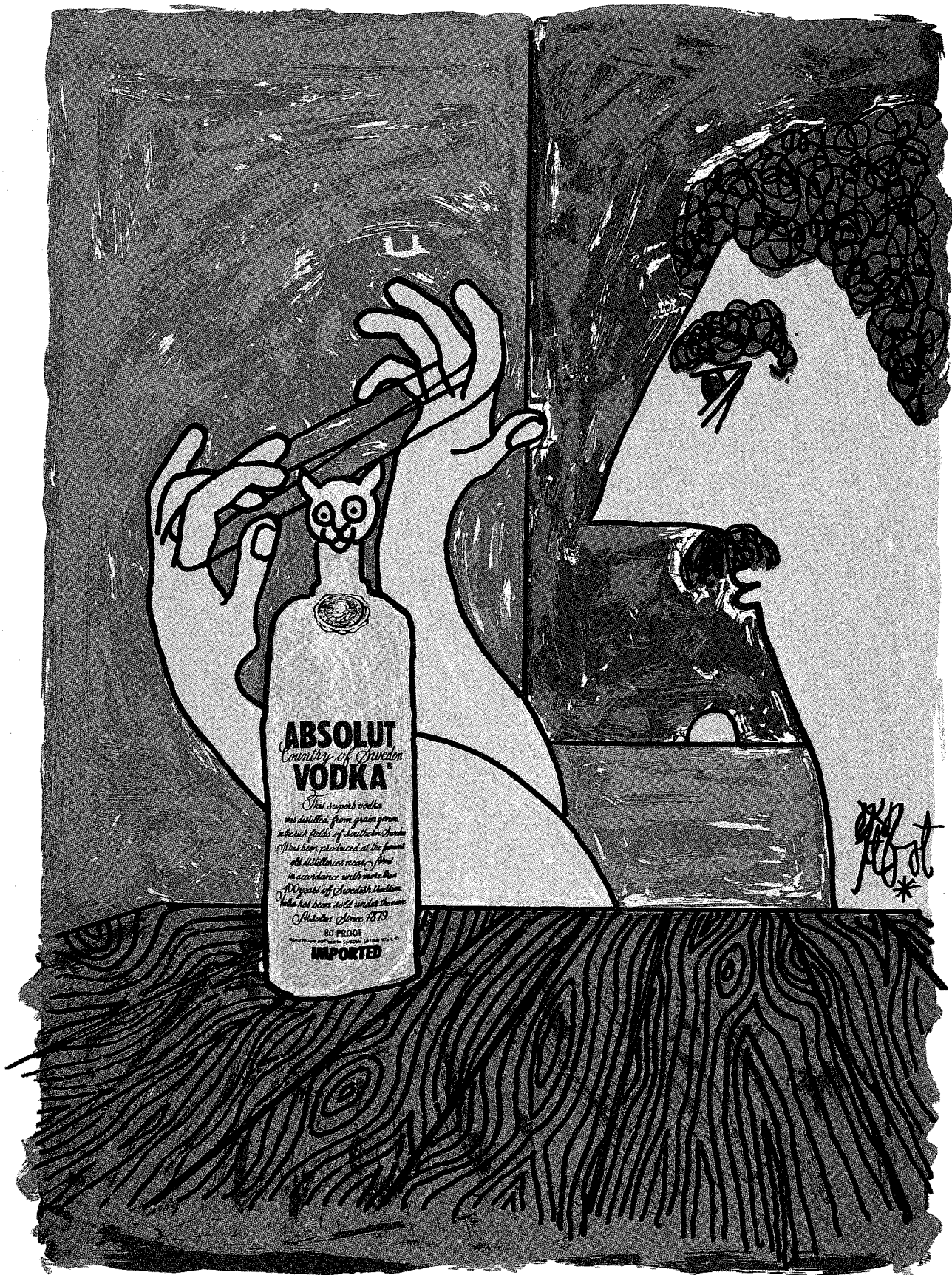
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